

Third Sunday in Lent

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 33:7-20

⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. ¹⁰ “Son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?”’” ¹¹ Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’” ¹² “Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, ‘The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.’” ¹³ If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. ¹⁴ And if I say to the wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right— ¹⁵ if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live. ¹⁷ “Yet your countrymen say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ But it is their way that is not just. ¹⁸ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. ¹⁹ And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. ²⁰ Yet, O house of Israel, you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ But I will judge each of you according to his own ways.”

33:7-9 These three verses are verbally almost identical with 3:17–19, and virtually indistinguishable in content as well. All that differs is the application (and possibly the outer circumstances, but on that we are uninformed). In chapter 3, the verses were part of Ezekiel’s call or commissioning and were intended to impress upon him the (literally) life or death gravity of the vocation he was entering. There the message came in private, but here it is public and is intended to clarify to the people what he had been about all these years. As the final verses of the chapter (33:30–33) make clear, most had not understood or accepted his message. (CC)

Furthermore, in essence, these verses really add nothing to what 33:1–6 has already asserted. The previous verses have stated the principles of Yahweh’s administration abstractly and in legal language. Now everything is personalized: Yahweh is doing the appointing of a watchman, and Ezekiel is the one whom Yahweh has appointed. And now is the time when pleas of guilty or not guilty must be made, and the appropriate sentence imposed. (CC)

33:7 *house of Israel*. Both the nation and the individuals. Compare vv. 7–9 with 3:17–19. (CSB)

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A WATCHMAN – tsafah means to keep watch or to look out for. Ezekiel is to keep watch, to look out for Israel with regard to the word of Yahweh. He is to make sure that they hear the Word of God. A watchman standing on the wall of the city is to warn the inhabitants of any approaching danger so that they may be ready – a watchman standing on the wall who is awaiting news from Jerusalem. Ezekiel is to warn the people of Israel of the approaching judgment of God. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

Because Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians, the nation of Judah was no longer an independent political entity. Therefore, as a watchman Ezekiel could more easily focus the people’s attention on their relationship with God. Their real enemy was no longer Babylon, or Egypt, or anyone else. Their real enemy was sin. The inhabitants had only themselves to blame for what had happened to Jerusalem. (PBC)

God is saying to Ezekiel, “Even though at the present time there isn’t really a Jewish nation, the relationship of these individuals to me is still of primary importance to me. You are still to warn against sin. You are still to proclaim the message of my love for sinners. This message alone can bring people to saving faith. This message will recreate the nation as a viable entity when I will need it to be one.” (PBC)

Looking back from our point in history, we know Ezekiel was successful. His work was largely responsible for accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of keeping a scattered handful of interested people spiritually eager to maintain their national existence. This was what the Lord needed if He was going to carry out His promises of the world’s Savior through this nation. (PBC)

33:8 HOLD YOU ACCOUNTABLE – If the prophet does not warn the wicked of God’s judgment, he will still die in his guilt, but the prophet also will share a responsibility for the wicked’ death. Does this mean the prophet will also die? It would if his neglect were an indication of his unbelief. But most likely here it is to be interrupted in the sense that Paul speaks of neglect and unfaithful works of a servant of God being burned away in God’s judgment, though the prophet himself will be saved (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). This interpretation, however, is not to lessen the severity of the warning stated in this verse. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

The prophetic ministry of Ezekiel was no less difficult than that of Jeremiah. Both men were near contemporaries. But while Jeremiah's ministry was in Judah during the last days before the destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction itself, and the resulting Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel spent his ministry in Babylon among the exiles.

33:9 WILL HAVE SAVED YOURSELF – This verse does not state the joy of the prophet over a sinner that repents at his preaching, which would certainly be present. But it does speak of the other side of the prophet's faithfulness in his task. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

33:10 *Our offenses and sins.* The first time the exiles expressed consciousness of sin. Previously they had blamed their fathers (18:2) and even God (18:19, 25). (CSB)

Cf ch 18 for the principle of individual responsibility. As preacher of restoration, Ezekiel has to cope with negative responses such as despair. When his fellow prisoners came face-to-face with the consequences of sin (as predicted by Ezekiel), they stoically resigned themselves to rot away. (TLSB)

The absence of the word-event formula (as in 33:1) or any other introductory formula suggests that the two following exchanges between prophet and the people (33:10–16 and 33:17–20) were delivered at the same time as the preceding oracle (33:1–9). In any case, the text clearly intends for us to take 33:1–9 and 33:10–20 together. (CC)

For the first time in the entire book, the people admit that their guilt is the cause of their suffering, depicting themselves in terms of Yahweh's predictions (4:17; 24:23). But "this is an empty cry for songs in the night; there is still no desire for the One who gives the songs." Their question is obviously rhetorical, assuming the negative answer that survival is impossible. In Lutheran terms, it represents a classical instance when the Law has done its work (*lex semper accusat*), but a Gospel-less vacuum still exists, which Yahweh will then fill in chapters 34–48. (CC)

33:11 *As surely as I live.* See note on 18:3. (CSB)

I take no pleasure.† The question of 18:23 is now a statement. God's intention for his creation is life, not death (see note on 16:6). (CSB)

"God does not will sin and has no pleasure in sin ... nor has He pleasure in [the sinner's] condemnation" (FC SD XI 81). Ter: "To all sins, then, committed whether by flesh or spirit, whether by deed or will, the same *God* who has destined penalty by means of judgment, has withal engaged to grant pardon by means of repentance" (*ANF* 3:659). Chem: "God clearly says in the case of the sins of the ungodly, which He foresees, that He neither wills, approves, aids, nor effects them, nor does He force their wills" (*LTh* 1:207). (TLSB)

Turn! The third call for repentance (see 14:6; 18:30). (CSB)

Ezekiel functions here as no mere therapist pointing the people to their own inner resources, but as a κήρυξ ("herald") of the Gospel, as he proceeds to apply Law and Gospel, expounding them in terms he has already laid down. Zimmerli does not overstate the Good News: "The complete

irrationality of the divine activity is discernible in this announcement: Yahweh, the enemy of his people, who draws the sword against them to annihilate them because of their disobedience—Yahweh at the same time, however, the God who sets up a watchman for his people, who will warn them of the sword in which he himself comes, and thus tries to make that sword ineffectual.” Dire as the situation may look, there still is time between the present and an irreversible death sentence—if they will only “turn.” God himself is the only one who can avert death and provide everlasting life; this he has done in the death and resurrection of his Son (Psalms 16 and 22). (CC)

33:12–20† Deals with the same subject as 18:21–29—namely, that God judges the individual, whether righteous or wicked. (CSB)

33:13-16 In the reworking of 18:21–22, 24 that largely underlies these verses, two things in particular strike us. First of all, the emphasis on divine address, absent in chapter 18, is prominent here. The two possibilities of life and death (repentance or apostasy) each begin with **אִם־אָמַרְתִּי**: “If I say to the righteous man, ‘He will surely live’ ” (33:13) and “When I say to the wicked man, ‘You will surely die’ ” (33:14). (CC)

Second, the possibility of repentance and life is highlighted more than that of apostasy and death, in answer to the people’s sense of hopelessness. This is evinced by the reversal in the sequence of the cases. Ezekiel here begins with the apostatized righteous (33:13) and ends with the repentant wicked (33:14–16), the opposite of the order in 18:21–24. The same slant is evident in the detail devoted to the repentant life (33:15) in contrast to the brevity of consideration of apostasy. A didactic element thus accompanies the consolatory: the new life will involve confessing one’s own sins, then turning from them and living by a faith that manifests itself in obedience to specific divine ordinances, which will bring in its wake not only a happier and more just society, but all the blessings summarized under the word “life.” Doubtless, this is not yet as full a picture of the abundant life (e.g., Jn 10:10) as has now been given Christians in the NT (and there is still much not yet revealed to us [1 Jn 3:2]), but the principle and the parameters are the same. (CC)

33:15 *gives back what he took in pledge ... returns what he has stolen.* See note on 18:7. (CSB)

decrees that give life. The purpose of God’s law was to foster and protect life (cf. 20:13, 21). (CSB)

he will surely live. The entire section is Ezekiel’s answer to the despairing question of v. 10. (CSB)

33:17-20 The precise thrust of this second expression of the people’s anomie depends on the precise meaning of the verb **צָדַק**, “be fair” (33:17, 20; see the textual note on it in 33:17). Our difficulty in settling on one, definitive translation may be part of the point of the entire section (33:17–20). To the people’s apparent complaint that Yahweh is acting in irrational, inscrutable, or unpredictable ways, Yahweh responds that their refusal to simply accept his offer of “amazing grace” even in this very last hour is irrational and incredible. Hence there is nothing to do but

repeat once again briefly the ultimately simple and clear principle by which he, the heavenly Judge, renders his verdicts. (CC)

The unbeliever is damned because of his unrighteous acts. However, a wicked man who repents and believes is justified forensically through faith, which is active in works of love (Gal 5:6), and none of his sins is remembered on Judgment Day. This same basis for God's judgment is depicted in NT passages such as Mt 25:31–46, where unbelievers are condemned because of their failure to do good works for Christ, whereas believers inherit eternal life because of the merits of Christ, whose grace empowered their good works for him and his brethren (Mt 25:35–40). Similarly, in Rev 20:11–15, the unbelievers are judged according to the records of their deeds, whereas believers are saved simply because their names are written in “the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). (CC)

The pericope ends abruptly without any concluding formula or hint of the people’s reaction. Or in the final vocative “O house of Israel,” do we, by the use of the covenant name “Israel,” hear one final plaintive, poignant plea that they recall “the rock from which [they] were hewn” (Is 51:1; cf. Gal 6:16)? (CC)

33:17 *The way of the LORD is not just.* Cf. 18:25, 29. (CSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. ⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! ¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Paul is aware that complacency could cause him to forfeit the heavenly prize (1 Cor 9:23–27). Now he turns from himself to the Corinthians. For them, too, the danger of being “disqualified” (9:27) is real. Paul expresses his concern for them with these words: “I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers” (10:1), a formula he commonly uses “to introduce something new and important.” (CC p. 322)

The imagery of the athletic games (9:24–27) is left behind, and the apostle turns to the OT, which provides instruction relevant for the church in the NT era (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11). Although the Corinthian church consisted mainly of Gentile Christians, these had now been grafted into the vine of Israel and were as much entitled as any Jewish Christian to think of the fathers of the Jewish people as “our fathers” in faith (1 Cor 10:1; cf. Rom 4:11–12 on Abraham’s role as the father of all believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised). The Christian church is the true Israel (Gal 6:16). (CC pp. 322-323)

10:1-5 Admittedly, the baptism into Moses and the spiritual eating and drinking in the wilderness were only shadows of the great sacraments of the NT era, Christian Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But it would be contrary to Paul’s argument to claim that these OT types lacked any relationship to the NT sacraments. Paul clearly accords them significance as prefigurements of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He draws a parallel between the Israelites, who were “baptized into Moses” (10:2) and ate the “spiritual food” and “spiritual drink” (10:3–4), and the Christians in Corinth. He emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Corinthians to faith in Christ through the Gospel (2:10–16). By the Holy Spirit they confessed Jesus as Lord (12:1–3). The Corinthians had received Christian Baptism: “we all were baptized with one Spirit into one body ... and we all were given to drink one Spirit” (12:13). They also had partaken of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (10:16–17; 11:23–34). Moreover, many had received various kinds of “spiritual gifts” (12:1; 14:1). (CC pp. 325-326)

Paul’s purpose in drawing the parallel is this: *just as many Israelites were disqualified because of their unfaithfulness and false worship, Christians too face the danger of being disqualified from salvation if they engage in false worship and fail to remain in repentance and faith worked by the Holy Spirit.* (CC p. 326)

Paul will make explicit this purpose in the following verses (10:6–14). He first spoke of the possibility that he himself might be “disqualified” from salvation if he did not exercise self-discipline (1 Cor 9:27). The need for Christians to avoid false worship is a central theme in 1 Corinthians 8–10. Paul will spell out the dire consequences of abusing the Lord’s Supper in 11:27–34. (CC p. 326)

In its attitude toward the sacraments, the church faces two equal and opposite temptations. One is the danger to which most of the Israelites and some of the Corinthians succumbed: the adoption of a complacent, “magical,” or *ex opere operato* view that there is spiritual benefit in simply “going through the motions,” taking the sacraments for granted and forgetting that their purpose is to engender and strengthen faith. Faith should lead to godly lives and appropriate works. A Christian cannot participate in the sacraments and then blithely continue to live in sin. Paul stated categorically that unrighteous people will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9–10; see also the excommunication of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5). Hays suggests that the Corinthians may have been arguing that “having participated in the mysteries of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, they [had] passed into a zone of spiritual blessedness that [made] them immune to any harm from associating with pagan worship.” The Corinthians misunderstood Baptism and failed to grasp their baptismal unity in Christ (1:10–16). Some of them saw nothing wrong with

dining in pagan temples (8:9–13; 10:14–31) and also partaking of the Lord’s Supper (10:16–17, 21). The church as a whole abused the Supper (11:17–22). (CC p. 326)

The other danger is for the church to detract from the reality and power of the sacraments as true spiritual food and drink, and reduce them to mere symbols. This happens when Christians consider Baptism to be merely a human action—a demonstration of *our* faith, rather than an action of God which confers the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, life, and salvation, as Scripture affirms (e.g., Acts 2:38–39; 1 Pet 3:21). Regarding the Lord’s Supper, this second danger occurs when Christians fail to discern the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament, which give to the communicant the benefits earned by Christ when he gave his body and shed his blood on the cross. (CC p. 326)

Commenting on 1 Cor 10:3, Chemnitz writes this:

Surely the text expressly and clearly deals with the point that the ancients among themselves had the same sacraments. For he says: “Our fathers all ate the same food.” And the ancient church fathers, except for Augustine, interpreted this passage this way. ... Paul applies this statement to his own situation in this way: Just as the same sacraments were held in common by all in the Old Testament, so also we in the New Testament all have the same sacraments, namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But just as then in the Old Testament God was not pleased with all who used these sacraments ... so also in the New Testament debauchers, fornicators, idolators, etc. [1 Cor 6:9–10], should not delude themselves because they have the same Baptism and the same Supper as the pious use. It is perfectly clear that Paul instituted and proposed this in order that he might take away from the Corinthians that false delusion that debauchery, whoring, communion with idols [1 Cor 10:16–21], etc., could not hurt them since they had been baptized and used the same Lord’s Supper as did the truly pious. (CC p. 327)

The church’s traditional understanding of 10:1–4 is finely preserved in the so-called “flood prayer” in Luther’s Order of Baptism:

Almighty eternal God, who according to thy righteous judgment didst condemn the unbelieving world through the flood and in thy great mercy didst preserve believing Noah and his family, *and who didst drown hardhearted Pharaoh with all his host in the Red Sea and didst lead thy people Israel through the same on dry ground, thereby prefiguring this bath of thy baptism*, and who through the baptism of thy dear Child, our Lord Jesus Christ, hast consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and a rich and full washing away of sins: We pray through the same thy groundless mercy that thou wilt graciously behold this N. [name of the person being baptized] and bless him with true faith. (CC p. 327)

10:1 FOR – γάρ—The particle (“for”) is left untranslated by RSV, NRSV, GNB, and JB. However, it has an important role in linking the argument of chapter 10 to chapter 9. The danger of being “disqualified” from salvation (9:27) is real, as the history of Israel proves. CC p. 321)

ALL – “All” of our fathers (1 Cor 10:1) experienced the exodus deliverance and God’s sustenance in the wilderness. The word “all” occurs five times in 10:1–4 and receives emphasis throughout the section. The whole nation received God’s grace. Paul first makes the point that *all* received these benefits *objectively*—all who passed through the sea and ate and drank in the wilderness. (Later, in 10:5–13, he will describe how *subjectively* many failed to receive and respond to God’s gifts *in faith*.) (CC p. 323)

Forefathers in the faith, the children of Israel. (TLSB)

under the cloud. Under God’s leadership and guidance (Ex 13:21–22; Nu 9:15–23; 14:14; Dt 1:33; Ps 78:14). His guidance did not fail them—he successfully led them through the sea (Ex 14:22, 29). (CSB)

The pillar of cloud that led the Israelites. (TLSB)

All were “under the cloud” (10:1) of God’s glorious presence and power. The Lord went before them “in a pillar of cloud” (Ex 13:21), and at one point the cloud moved behind them to protect them (Ex 14:19). Other texts speak of the Lord spreading “a cloud for a covering” (Ps 105:39; cf. Wisdom 19:7). The people were under a protective canopy. (CC p. 323)

PASSED THROUGH THE SEA – As the Lord provided this protection, they “all passed through the sea” (1 Cor 10:1). The waters of the Red Sea became a protective “wall to them on their right hand and on their left” (Ex 14:22). Like Noah and his family, they were saved through water (Genesis 6–8; 1 Pet 3:20–21). (CC p. 323)

The crossing of the Red Sea. (CLSB)

10:2 As a people, they were united under God’s redemptive program, and they submitted to Moses, God’s appointed leader (Ex 14:31). (CSB)

baptized.† A figure used to depict their submission to Moses as their deliverer and leader, just as Christian baptism, essentially a means of grace, also depicts the believer’s submission to Christ as Savior and Lord. (CSB)

A metaphor for the Israelites who passed through the waters of the Red Sea and emerged a new people, saved from slavery. (TLSB)

Israel’s safe passing through the waters of the Red Sea prefigures and typifies

Paul uses the noun τύπος, “prefigurement, type, pattern,” in 1 Cor 10:6 and the adverb τυπικῶς, “as a pattern, typologically,” in 10:11. When this commentary uses the words “type” and “typify,” it is referring to Paul’s hermeneutic in 10:6, 11, which also pertains to his overall interpretation of the OT in many other passages in his epistles. (CC p. 323)

the waters of Baptism. At the Red Sea, all the covenant people “were baptized into Moses” (1 Cor 10:2). They submitted to his leadership as he guided them through the waters, and when they saw what the Lord accomplished there, they “believed in the Lord and in his servant

Moses” (Ex 14:31). Their salvation “in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:2) led them to a trusting, personal relationship with the great mediator of the old covenant. (CC p. 323)

Cf. S. Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 323; L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 139. Fee disagrees with the suggestion that “by this ‘baptism’ Israel came into some kind of relation with Moses.” Fee claims that Paul is concerned about the Corinthians’ relationship to Christ, not to Moses (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 445, n. 19). But while that is certainly Paul’s chief concern, the present context dealing with Israel’s salvation history also needs to be taken seriously. En route to his final goal, Paul has important things to say about Israel’s relationship to Moses. Fee’s comment does not do justice to the clear import of 1 Cor 10:2a. He also overlooks Ex 14:31. L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 139, provides a more balanced statement: “They were united to him [Moses], though we should not press this, for no other union can be anything like as close as that between Christians and Christ.” The type is not as great as the antitype. But we should not detract from the importance and reality of the OT types for the OT believers, nor should we disregard their significance for us Christians today, as Paul stresses in 1 Cor 10:1, 6, 11. (CC p. 323)

(Later Paul will describe how not all responded with or remained in this trusting faith.) Accordingly Moses was a type of Jesus Christ, the greater mediator of the new covenant, into whom the Corinthian Christians had been baptized (1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13). (CC pp. 323-324)

ἐβαπτίσθησαν—A number of manuscripts, including the Majority Text, read the aorist middle ἐβαπτίσαντο, which could mean that the Israelites “baptized themselves” or “got themselves baptized.” Because of the difficulty of explaining how this variant arose if it were not original, Metzger, Fee, and others accept it as original. In favor of the aorist passive is its common use for Christian Baptism, including in 1 Corinthians (1:13, 15; 12:13; also Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; and often in Acts) and the preponderance of the textual evidence. BDF § 317, rejects the middle as “spurious.” The passive points to the divine initiative. *God* baptized the people into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (CC p. 321)

10:3–4 *spiritual food ... spiritual drink*. The manna and the water from the rock are used as figures representing the spiritual sustenance that God continually provides for his people (Ex 16:2–36; 17:1–7; Nu 20:2–11; 21:16). (CSB)

Food and drink from God, i.e., manna (Ex 16) and water from the rock (Ex 17:1–7; Nu 20:10–13). (TLSB)

SPIRITUAL – πνευματικόν—A variety of translations have been suggested for this adjective, which is translated above as “spiritual.” The summary in R. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 225–31, includes six main suggestions, from which the following are adapted. (1) A few scholars treat πνευματικός as synonymous with “sacramental,” but “there appears to be no parallel NT example where πνευματικός should be translated ‘sacramental.’” (2) “Intended for the (human) spirit” suggests that the food and drink strengthened the spirit or inner life of the recipients. God’s provision evoked Israel’s praise and strengthened their faith in his guidance and care for them. (3) “Wonderful” suggests that the adjective is an epithet of excellence similar

to the English words “celestial,” “heavenly,” or “divine.” (4) “Supernatural” emphasizes that the manna and the water from the rock were provided by God supernaturally and miraculously. NEB REB and RSV translate the adjective as “supernatural.” (5) “Spiritual” or “with a spiritual background” is related to “supernatural” but has in view the miraculous provision of sustenance as part of Israel’s larger history under God. The events were not natural, earthly events but were freighted with “spiritual,” theological significance in the history of God’s redemption of his people. (6) “Figurative” expresses the significance of the food and drink given Israel by God as figures, types, signs, or prophecies pointing to the later NT sacraments given by God to the church. (CC pp. 321-322)

Of these suggestions, “spiritual” is most preferable and is the choice of NIV and NRSV among others. It is literally correct and preserves the connection with the Holy Spirit, a link that is particularly evident in 1 Cor 2:10–15 and 12:1–13. See further the section “The Significance of 10:1–5 for the Church’s Sacramental Theology and Practice” in the commentary below. (CC pp. 321-322)

Just as all the fathers of Israel received a type of Baptism, so they also received a type of the Lord’s Supper. All of them were sustained by the manna, described by the psalmist as the “grain of heaven,” the “bread of angels” (Ps 78:24–25; the Vulgate’s translation of LXX Ps 77:24–25 is “panem caeli ... panem angelorum”), which the Lord “rained ... on them to eat” (Ps 78:24; cf. Ex 16:4, 35). Its heavenly origin explains Paul’s designation of the manna as “spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:3). It was superior to ordinary bread, just as the “spiritual body” with which the believer will be clothed in the resurrection is superior to the natural body (15:42–44). (CC p. 324)

Käsemann asserts that “βρῶμα and πόμα πνευματικόν undoubtedly mean ‘food and drink which convey pneuma’ ” (“The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague [London: SCM, 1964] 113). Cf. R. Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 38–39. Käsemann’s bold assertion may be going too far, not because it places an un-Pauline emphasis on the sacraments (the concern expressed by G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447, n. 31), but because to say that the manna and water consumed by Israel actually conveyed the Spirit may outrun the biblical evidence. Again, the antitype is greater than the type. The manna may be called “spiritual” simply because of its heavenly origin. Cf. E. Schweizer, “πνεῦμα, πνευματικός,” *TDNT* 6:437. (CC p. 324)

10:4 DRINK...DRANK – ἔπιον ... ἔπινον—The first verb, in the aorist tense, simply indicates a fact (“they drank”); the second verb, in the imperfect, portrays “the manner of the action” as “being in progress” over a period of time (BDF § 327): “they were drinking.” The period of time would be the forty years during which Israel wandered in the wilderness. (CC p. 322)

SPIRITUAL ROCK – In Jewish tradition, the wisdom from God continuously supplied water to the Israelites through a single rock, which traveled with them. Paul uses this image of God’s faithful provision to heighten the shock at the faithlessness of Israel. (TLSB)

that rock was Christ. The rock, from which the water came, and the manna were symbolic of supernatural sustenance through Christ, the bread of life and the water of life (Jn 4:14; 6:30–35). (CSB)

Paul, who describes Christ as the wisdom from God (1:30), equates Christ with this rock. Therefore, the Israelites had the benefit of being served by Christ, yet even they were not preserved against perishing (10:5). It is a warning to the Corinthians to watch out lest the same happen to them. (TLSB)

ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας—Literally, “from the spiritual following rock.” (CC p. 322)

Likewise all the fathers received “the same spiritual drink” (10:4), which was water, but which also corresponds to the wine of the Lord’s Supper.

Compare the prayer of thanksgiving after the Lord’s Supper in Didache 10:3 (*The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 263; emphasis added): You, almighty Master, created all things for your name’s sake, and gave food and drink to men to enjoy, that they might give you thanks; but to us you have graciously given *spiritual food and drink* [πνευματικὴν τροφήν καὶ ποτόν], and eternal life through your servant [Christ]. (CC p. 324)

Both at the beginning and at the end of their wilderness wanderings, the Lord provided them with the miraculous water from the rock.

Ex 17:6; Num 20:7–11; Pss 78:20; 105:41; 114:8; Is 48:21. Apparently this was the origin of the charming Jewish legend that a movable well—shaped like a rock and about the size of an oven or beehive—used to accompany the Israelites up hill and down dale on their wanderings, supplying all their needs for water and performing other marvelous services. Paul may have been familiar with this legend, but he does not refer to it directly. Cf. E. E. Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 67. On page 69 Ellis cites S. R. Driver:

St Paul views the water which the Israelites drank in the wilderness as provided for them by Christ, in His preexistent Divine nature, who attended and watched over His people, whom he represents under the figure of a rock, accompanying them through their journeyings. The particular expression chosen by the apostle may have been *suggested* to him by his acquaintance with the legend current among the Jews; but it is evident that he gives it an entirely different application. (“Notes on Three Passages in St Paul’s Epistles,” *The Expositor*, Third Series, ed. W. R. Nicoll, vol. 9 [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889] 18) (CC p. 324)

Paul points to Christ as the true spiritual rock who accompanied Israel (10:4), ascribing to him the title “the rock,” which the OT ascribes to the Lord (Yahweh) as Israel’s great protector.

Gen 49:24; Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31; Pss 18:2, 31; 62:2; 78:35; 89:26; 95:1. R. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 161, suggests that the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 32 may have been one factor that “influenced Paul’s identification of Christ with the rock.” This passage, he

notes, is “central to Paul’s thinking in this chapter ... [and] repeatedly ascribes to God the title ‘the Rock’ (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31).” He also notes how the divine Wisdom is said to have provided Israel with water in the wilderness (Wisdom 11:4). He points out Philo’s identification of the rock with the wisdom of God (“the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God,” *Legum Allegoriae*, 2:86 [*The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge, 47]) and suggests that these ideas also may have influenced Paul in his formulation of 1 Cor 1:30 (Christ—the wisdom of God) and 10:4. (CC p. 325)

According to Deuteronomy 32, this rock “found him [Israel] in a desert land. ... He nursed him with honey from a cliff, with oil from flinty *rock*; curds from the herd, and milk from the flock. ... You drank the blood of grapes as wine” (Deut 32:10, 13–14). Paul’s identification of the rock with Christ “is significant for Christology, as of course is the clear implication of Christ’s pre-existence” (“the rock was Christ,” 1 Cor 10:4). (CC pp. 324-325)

10:5 *God was not pleased with most of them.* In spite of the remarkable privileges given to Israel (vv. 1–4), they failed to obey God, thus incurring his displeasure. Of the adults who came out of Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to enter Canaan (Nu 14:22–24, 28–35; Jos 1:1–2). (CSB)

Contrasted with the “all” of vv 1–4. Not all the Israelites were unfaithful; so, too, not all the Corinthians are in danger of losing the prize, only those who destroy the faith of others. (TLSB)

WERE SCATTERED – καταστρώθησαν—BAGD 1, defines καταστρώννυμι as “lay low, kill.” In classical and Koine Greek the verb can have that same meaning: “lay low” (LSJ III), that is “to kill.” The verb can also mean “to spread out,” “scatter about” (see LSJ, I and II; LSJ, II, cites Diodorus Siculus, *Historicus*, 14.114: πεδίον νεκρῶν καταστρώθη, “the plain was strewn with corpses”). As Fee observes, “Surely this is the picture intended here.” Cf. JB “their corpses littered the desert.” Heb 3:17 says “their bodies fell in the wilderness.” The LXX uses the active form of the Greek verb in Num 14:16 when Moses is trying to persuade God not to punish the people, lest the pagan nations say, “He [God] slaughtered [MT טָהַר; LXX: κατέστρωσεν] them in the wilderness.” (CC p. 322)

God’s judgment, which resulted in the death of many Israelites, took place frequently in the journey from Egypt. (TLSB)

10:6 THESE THINGS – ὑποίημῶν—Literally, “types of us.” Modern translations often render “types” either as “warnings” (RSV, JB) or “examples” (NIV, NKJV, Phillips NRSV) In his commentary Fee opts for “warning examples.” These attempts, however, imply that the types only have a negative, Law-oriented value. None of these translations fully captures the salutary way Paul uses the OT τύποι for the benefit of the church, as Hays observes: “The phrase does not mean—despite many translations—‘warnings for us’. It means ‘types of us’, prefigurations of the *ekklesia*.” See also τυπικῶς in 10:11. (CC p. 328)

The word τύπος derives from τύπτω (“to strike”) and means “the impress made by the blow, what is formed, what leaves its impress, the form-giving form, hence form gen[erally] as outline.” Thus John’s gospel uses it of the “marks” left by the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet (Jn 20:25). It

can refer to an image or statue as something that has been formed (LXX Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43). It also refers to the formative influence of one person on another, the “example, pattern” set by the apostles, pastors, or believers. (Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:7; 2 Thess 3:9; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet 5:3) In Rom 6:17 Paul uses it of the pattern of Christian teaching. Finally, it is used as a hermeneutical term for OT persons, events, and institutions which foreshadow the great eschatological events of the NT. Thus Adam is explicitly said to be a “type” of Christ (τύπος, Rom 5:14). Similarly David as the “lamp of Israel” prefigures Christ, “the light of the world” (2 Sam 21:17; Jn 8:12). The typological correspondence between key OT persons, events, and institutions, and their NT antitypes points to “the essential similarity in God’s acts” in both judgment and salvation. (CC pp. 328-329)

The first illustration (10:6) refers to the incident that occurred immediately after Israel set out from Sinai. The rabble among them yielded to an intense craving for the meat and fresh vegetables that were plentiful in Egypt, and complained bitterly about the manna. In response, the Lord supplied them with quails but struck many of them with a plague. “So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah (‘the graves of craving’), because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving” (Num 11:4–5, 31–34). (CC p. 332)

The foods which were the objects of their craving were not “evil things” (1 Cor 10:6) in themselves, but they were evil because of their association with the idolatrous land of Egypt, and because the people preferred them over the manna, water, and other provisions God graciously gave them in the wilderness. In craving these things, the people were preferring slavery, idolatry, and impurity to the worship of the true God, when they should have been girding up their loins and setting their hopes fully on the gracious provision God had in store for them (cf. 1 Pet 1:13). Likewise the Corinthians were tempted to crave the conviviality and the meat and other delicacies offered in idol temples. Paul addresses this issue at length in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:14–33. Such coveting amounted to sin against the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet” (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21), and was in itself a form of idolatry, that is, a sin against the First Commandment (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). (CC p. 332)

Not that the events were mere “examples,” but that the Corinthians should learn a lesson from what happened to Israel. Just as the Israelites were unfaithful to God, so now some Corinthians were unfaithful; just as God judged Israel, so God would judge the Corinthians (cf v 11). (TLSB)

SETTING OUR HEARTS – ἐπιθυμητὰς ... καθὼς κάκεῖνοι ἐπεθύμησαν—ἐπιθυμία (“craving, desire, greed, covetousness”; cf. Latin *concupiscentia*) is denounced in the LXX version of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21; cf. Rom 7:7–8). James 1:14–15 treats it as the source of other sins. (CC p. 329)

as they did. What Paul has in mind is described in vv. 7–10. (CSB)

10:7 idolaters. Referring to the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32:1–6). The people ate a ritual meal sacrificed to an idol (cf. ch. 8). (CSB)

A summary of the golden calf incident in Ex 32. Just as the Israelites were guilty of participating in worship of false gods and eating with them, so some Corinthians were doing the same (1Co 8). (TLSB)

Coveting could also foster the grosser forms of idolatry. Paul's second illustration (1 Cor 10:7) refers to the golden calf Aaron fashioned from the people's earrings (Exodus 32), in defiance of the First Commandment's prohibition against the construction of images (Ex 20:4–6; Deut 5:8–10). Aaron built an altar before the calf and proclaimed a feast to the Lord. Then the Israelites "offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (Ex 32:6). The consequences were disastrous: the Lord came close to wiping out the whole nation in his anger but relented when Moses interceded for the people. However, "about three thousand men of the people fell that day" at the hands of the Levites (Ex 32:28). (CC pp. 332-333)

PAGAN REVELRY – παίζειν—The Hebrew equivalent רָחַץ can mean "play" in the sense of sexual dalliance (Gen 26:8; 39:14, 17). Paul quotes LXX Ex 32:6, where παίζειν translates רָחַץ. (CC p. 329)

Paul warns the Corinthians against falling into similar idolatry. Just as the Israelites had fallen into the temptation of sitting down and eating in honor of an idol, bringing the Lord's wrath on their heads, so some of the Corinthians were reclining and eating and drinking in an idol's temple (1 Cor 8:10; cf. 10:14–22). This could only have disastrous consequences. (CC p. 333)

10:8 Refers to Israel's joining herself to Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1–9), participating in the worship of this god of the Moabites and engaging in sexual immorality with the prostitute virgins who worshiped this god. (CSB)

In the case of the golden calf, the people's worship degenerated into sexual immorality: "they rose up to play" (Ex 32:6; 1 Cor 10:7). The verb has overtones of sexual play (cf. Gen 26:8; 39:14, 17). Breaking the First Commandment led them also to break the Sixth. (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18; cf. 1 Cor 6:12–20; Rev 2:14, 20) The Corinthians too were guilty of sexual immorality, since they tolerated a gross form of incest in the midst of the congregation (1 Corinthians 5), and some were frequenting prostitutes (6:15–20). Paul had to warn them that the sexually immoral, including adulterers and homosexuals, will not inherit God's kingdom (6:9). (CC p. 333)

SEXUAL IMMORALITY – Paul then includes a third illustration, another example of sexual sin (10:8). Just as in the golden calf incident Israel's self-indulgence led to idol worship and from there to fornication, so the pattern was repeated at Shittim in the plains of Moab. The Moabites invited the people to their fertility rites in honor of the Baal of Peor, which resulted in some of the Israelite men having intercourse with Moabite women. The Lord's anger was kindled. He gave instructions that the leaders of the people should be killed and exposed, and sent a plague that left 24,000 more corpses in the wilderness (Num 25:1–18). This incident at the very gates of the Promised Land is referred to a number of times in Scripture (Deut 4:3; Ps 106:28–29; Hos 9:10). Echoing Num 31:16, the book of Revelation blames the teaching of the prophet Balaam for the incident. Balaam advised the Moabite king Balak "to throw an enticement to sin before the

Israelites [so as to cause them] to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality” (Rev 2:14; cf. Rev 2:20). (CC p. 333)

Paul is warning the Christians in Corinth not to fall into the same trap of idolatry and its attendant immorality. As the true temple of God, with the Spirit of God dwelling within them, their lives should be characterized by holiness (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19). Sexual sins are uniquely vile because they are sins against one’s own body (6:18). (CC p. 333)

twenty-three thousand.† The Hebrew and Greek (Septuagint) texts of Nu 25:9 have 24,000. It is clear that Paul is not striving for preciseness. He is only speaking approximately. The exact number no doubt was somewhere between these two figures. (CSB)

ἴκοσι τρεῖς χιλιάδες—A negligible number of manuscripts read 24,000, in harmony with Num 25:9. The NA²⁷ editors have included Num 26:62 with Num 25:1, 9 in the marginal readings at this point. By this they are suggesting that a memory lapse may have led Paul to recall the number given in connection with registration of the Levites (“the number of those enrolled was 23,000,” Num 26:62) rather than the number given in the previous chapter in connection with the plague (Num 25:1, 9). See further the commentary below. (CC p. 329)

Many interpreters have been intrigued by the discrepancy between Num 25:9, which states that 24,000 died in the plague, and Paul’s figure of 23,000 in 1 Cor 10:8. A number of scribes were aware of the difficulty and corrected Paul’s figure, but the paucity of these variants probably indicates that the original epistle had 23,000. Among the various attempts at harmonization, the most common is to suggest that both the Numbers text and Paul used round numbers. One intriguing suggestion comes from Godet, who thought Paul might have been following a rabbinical practice (similar to the “forty stripes less one” in 2 Cor 11:24) of reducing a number to avoid the risk of exaggeration. Whatever the explanation may be, the discrepancy between the numbers does not detract from Paul’s point: idolatry and immorality bring down God’s judgment on a massive scale. (CC pp. 333-334)

DIED – ἔπεσαν—Cf. BAGDs.v. πίπτω, 2 a β: “*fall* in the relig[ious] or moral sense, *be completely ruined*. ... Also in a less severe sense = *go astray morally*” (cf. Prov 24:16; Rom 14:4). (CC p. 329)

10:9 SHOULD NOT TEST – μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν—The compound verb is an intensified form of πειράζω. It signifies “willfully put to the test,” “boldly challenge” (cf. Ps 78:18 [LXX 77:18]). An OT example where Israel did this is Ex 17:1–7, with the verb נָחַן, “to test,” in Ex 17:7. (CC p. 329)

Because the preexistent Christ is active prior to His incarnation (cf 10:4; Jn 1:3), sinning against God is sinning against Christ. The Corinthians also sin against Christ by their behavior (8:12). (TLSB)

Paul’s fourth illustration follows in 1 Cor 10:9. By their impatience and complaining on the way, the Israelites often tested the Lord’s patience to its limits. One of the earliest incidents occurred at the place called Massah (“Testing”) and Meribah (“Quarreling”), because there the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord (Ex 17:7; cf. Ps 78:18). This incident later prompted Moses’

admonition, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah” (Deut 6:16; cf. Mt 4:7). That incident involved water, which God graciously provided to them *in Christ* (1 Cor 10:4). (CC p. 334)

THE LORD – Χριστόν—κύριον (“Lord”) is the reading of κ B and a number of other manuscripts; θεόν (“God”) is the reading in Alexandrinus. But Χριστόν (“Christ”) has broad support, including P⁴⁶ D and the Majority Text, and is the reading that best explains the origin of the others. Metzger explains: “The difficulty of explaining how the ancient Israelites in the wilderness could have tempted Christ prompted some copyists to substitute either the ambiguous κύριον or the unobjectionable θεόν. Paul’s reference to Christ here is analogous to that in [1 Cor 10:]4.” Osburn has also argued in support of τὸν Χριστόν in “The Text of I Corinthians 10:9.” Gieschen notes that “this same problem can be seen in the text of Jude 5.” (CC p. 329)

WERE DESTROYED – ἀπώλλυντο—Cf. Robertson and Plummer: “perished day by day.” The imperfect suggests the judgment occurred over a several-day period. (CC p. 330)

But in 10:9 Paul has in mind another occasion, when God sent “snakes” after Israel tempted the Christ who followed them in the wilderness. As they made the long march around Edom, “the people became impatient on the way, and the people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this accursed food.’ Then the Lord sent the fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and many people from Israel died” (Num 21:4–6). Probably it is significant that this example too involves despising the “spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:3), the manna, and the water which God graciously provided them *in Christ* (10:4). It was a sin against Christ himself. (CC p. 334)

10:10 *do not grumble.* As in Nu 16:41. (CSB)

Complaining about God’s actions, here with reference to Nu 14:1–38. (TLSB)

μηδὲ γογγύζετε—The onomatopoeic words γογγύζω and γογγυσμός occur frequently in the LXX of Exodus and Numbers (translating the verb מיל and the noun הַלְלָה) with reference to Israel’s “murmurings” in the wilderness against God and Moses, (E.g., Ex 16:7; 17:3; Num 11:1) and in the NT with reference to the Jews “grumbling” about Jesus. (Lk 5:30; Jn 6:41, 43, 61; 7:12, 32) If Christians learn to do “all things without grumbling,” they will “shine like stars in the world” (Phil 2:14–15; cf. 1 Pet 4:19).

Finally, as his fifth illustration, Paul urges the Corinthians not to follow Israel’s example in grumbling against the Lord and Moses (10:10). Grumbling is a recurrent theme in the wilderness accounts. (E.g., Ex 16:2; 17:2–3; Num 11:1–6; 14:2; 16:41; 21:5) But Paul has in mind a specific incident. Some commentators believe it is Numbers 14, after the spies returned from Canaan, and the people refused to trust that the Lord would enable them to conquer the Promised Land. The whole congregation raised an outcry against Moses and Aaron, and the Lord pronounced the judgment: “Your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness” (Num 14:29; cf. 14:16). It was to this judgment that Paul referred in 1 Cor 10:5. However, the reference to “the Destroyer”

(10:10) leads others to conclude that uppermost in Paul’s mind is the Numbers 16 account of the earth swallowing up Korah and company. Again this was in response to complaints against Moses and Aaron (Num 16:3, 41). Numbers 16 does not refer to the Destroyer (τιηψηη, as in Ex 12:23), but in its recounting of the story, the book of Wisdom attributed the ensuing plague to “the Destroyer,” the angel of destruction (Wisdom 18:25). If the Christians in Corinth persisted in grumbling against the apostolic authority of Paul and his colleagues, they ran the risk of suffering the same destruction.

Gieschen has demonstrated in detail that Paul probably “understood ‘Christ’ (10:9) to be the agent of punishment against Israel’s disobedience and against the disobedience of the church in his [Paul’s] day.” Gieschen’s argument is developed against the background of an extensive treatment of the OT and apocryphal “angelomorphic Christology” (the appearance of the Lord in the form of an angel). Within the NT he points to Jude 5, where according to the more difficult reading “Jesus delivered his people from Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe,” and the picture of Christ as the Destroying Angel in Rev 19:11–16 (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 325–29). (CC p. 335)

For the church today, the equivalent grumbling would be to question and even to rebel against the authority of the sacred Scriptures, or against the church’s ministers who faithfully proclaim and live by the Scriptures. (CC pp. 334-335)

Korah’s specific sin was to claim that all the Israelites were just as holy as Moses and Aaron, and that by carrying out their prophetic and priestly calls Moses and Aaron were exalting themselves over the congregation (Num 16:3). In modern terms, Korah claimed that the priesthood of all believers makes the pastoral office unnecessary and that anyone could assume the pastoral office even without a divine call (see Num 16:10). (CC p. 335)

destroying angel. Paul links the angel who brought the plague of Nu 16:46–50—because of the grumbling of the Israelites against Moses and Aaron (Nu 16:41)—with the destroying angel of Ex 12:23. (CSB)

τοῦ ὀλοθρευτοῦ—Paul has in mind the destroying angel of Ex 12:23 (MT तिηψηη; LXX ὀλεθρευτων; cf. Heb 11:28); 2 Sam 24:16 (LXX ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ διαφθειρων); 1 Chr 21:12 (LXX: ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐξολεθρεύων); 1 Chr 21:15; and Wisdom 18:25 (LXX: ὁ ὀλεθρευτων). This is the only occurrence of ὀλοθρευτής in biblical Greek. (CC p. 330)

10:11 THESE THINGS – τυπικῶς—Literally, the adverb means “typologically.” See the textual note on τύπος in 1 Cor 10:6. According to Fee, the adverb “does not mean ‘typologically’ here, as the following phrase ... indicates.” Fee’s interpretation depends on seeing δέ as “slightly adversative, contrasting what happened to them and what was written for our warning.” But that involves taking τυπικῶς in a different sense from τύποι in 10:6, which seems unlikely in the context. Paul’s hermeneutic in interpreting the OT remains consistent throughout 1 Corinthians 10. (CC p. 330)

After recounting these five episodes from Israel's years in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:6–10) that resulted in the people's corpses littering the landscape (10:5), Paul sums up: All these disasters happened to Israelites "typologically," "as a prefigurement" (10:11) of the way God deals with his people in both judgment and salvation. These events were recorded not just for Israel's sake but "for our instruction" (10:11; cf. Rom 15:4). We now live "in the last days" (Acts 2:17), indeed "the last hour" of this world (1 Jn 2:18). All the "ages" of this universe, all the different epochs, have by God's gracious provision reached their common "goals" (1 Cor 10:11), their consummation in Jesus' death and resurrection (Heb 9:26), which inaugurated these last days so freighted with significance. Now we live constantly in the shadow of the last great day, the day of his final coming. (CC p. 335)

The Corinthians are to learn from the negative example of the Israelites (cf v 6). (TLSB)

HAPPENED – συνέβαιεν—The imperfect accents the continuing narrative of the events that *happened* to Israel throughout her history. There is a great deal of repetition in that history, as God continued to be gracious, many of the people kept rebelling, and God's many acts of judgment failed to bring many of the stiff-necked people to repentance. (CC p. 330)

written down as warnings. See note on Ro 15:4. (CSB)

νουθεσίαν—See the textual note on νουθετέω in 1 Cor 4:14. Paul's statement here, "for our instruction [νουθεσίαν]," is virtually the same as his statement in Rom 15:4: "As many things as were written beforehand, were written for our teaching [διδασκαλίαν]." (CC p. 331)

fulfillment of the ages. The period of time inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection and continuing into the future until Christ's second coming and beyond. It is the period of fulfillment when all that God has been doing for his people throughout all previous ages comes to its fruition in the Messiah. (CSB)

Though Israel could only hope for the coming of Christ, the Corinthians had the advantage of living in the last days when God fulfilled His promise of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. (TLSB)

τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων—J. Weiss proposed the translation "the ends of the ages." He explained the plural "ages" as a reference to both the old aeon and the new, "i.e., the end-point of the first and beginning of the second; this view urges that the earliest Christians believed that the two ages came together during their own lifetimes: *we, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*" BAGD s.v. αἰών, 2 b, on the other hand, suggests that "τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰ[ώνων] can perh[aps] be regarded as equal to τέλος αἰώνων ... = *the end of the age(s).*" A less likely interpretation, that τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων means "the (spiritual) revenues of the ages" (see Mt 17:25; Rom 13:7 for the use of τέλος in the sense of "revenue"), is advanced by A. Souter and P. Macpherson. Cf. Morris: "We should then reap the fruits of the experience of those ages." (CC p. 330)

Most satisfactory, however, is the view advanced by Delling: "In 1 C[or]. 10:11 the context ... suggests that τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων refers more precisely to 'the aims of the times.' " That is reflected in the translation above as "the *goals* of the ages." Delling continues: "Of these times

an especially prominent one was the wilderness age of Israel ([1 Cor 10:]1–10). They find fulfilment in the present events determined by Christ.” He notes that in contrast with Greek sayings about the τέλος of men, the NT sayings “do not set man in the centre.” In Rom 10:4, while interpreting Israel’s history, Paul says that “the goal [τέλος] of the Torah [νόμου] is Christ.” (CC p. 331)

10:12 STANDING...FALL – ὥστε ὁ δοκῶν ἐστάναι βλεπέτω μὴ πέσῃ—The Greek uses the masculine definite article and the corresponding masculine participle, followed by two third person singular verbs. There is no warrant for the change to second person (“so if you think you are standing ...”) in NRSV and REB (CC p. 331)

Mindful of this, the Corinthians should not be complacent and arrogant (1 Cor 10:12). Paul would later warn the Christians in Rome that since unbelief caused the natural branches (most Jewish people) to be broken off from the olive tree, how much more should Gentile Christians—wild branches grafted in—remain repentant, lest they too be broken off from the olive tree of the church. It was only by humble faith in Christ that they continued to stand. So he urges, “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid” (Rom 11:20 NIV Paul’s concern reflects the biblical maxim “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18 NIV). Likewise those Corinthian Christians who prided themselves on their power and freedom in the Spirit should be careful not to fall from grace. (CC pp. 335-336)

Misplaced confidence in one’s own strength. *fall*. Into sin and away from God. (TLSB)

10:13 *temptation*. Temptation in itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted (Mt 4:1–11). Yielding to the temptation is sin. (CSB)

εἴληφεν—Cf. BAGD s.v. λαμβάνω, 1 c: “esp[ecially] of feelings, emotions *seize, come upon*τινά *someone*.” (CC p. 331)

MAN – νθρώπινος—Cf. BAGD s.v. ἀνθρώπινος, 1: “*a temptation common to man ... i.e., bearable.*” BAGD cites Pollux 3, 27, 131, who “also mentions among the concepts which form a contrast to ὃ οὐκ ἄν τις ὑπομένειεν [‘which no one could endure’], the expr[ession] τὸ ἀνθρώπινον [‘what is human’].” According to Jeremias, ἀνθρώπινος in 10:13 “does not refer to the origin of temptation (i.e., its derivation from man, which would be contrary to v. 13b), but to its puny strength, i.e., that it may be borne by the weakness of human nature.” It is the kind of temptation that humanity is commonly called on to endure. (CC p. 331)

Having sounded a warning against the dangers of complacency and pride, the apostle hastens to add a corresponding word of encouragement. The Corinthians will not be tested beyond their God-given capacity. The temptations they will encounter are the trials “common to humanity” (1 Cor 10:13), trials to which all sinners are susceptible (cf. Gal 6:1). In each of Paul’s five OT examples in 1 Cor 10:6–10, many Israelites fell, but God in his grace always kept some from falling, and God desired and tried hard to save all. Those who fell were the ones who spurned God’s Word and promises, but nevertheless God remains true to his promises (1 Cor 1:9). As the psalmist expresses it, “By the Lord the steps of a man are made secure, and then he [God] delights in his path; though he [a man] fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord is the stay

of his hand” (Ps 37:23–24). Faced with these trials the Corinthians can count on God’s faithfulness (1 Cor 10:13); he will keep them from falling (Jude 24). That God remains faithful to his covenant promises stands as an axiom of biblical theology. (Deut 7:9; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23; 11:11; 1 Jn 1:9) With every trial he will provide strength to endure “one day at a time,” and he will also in his own good time create the specific “way out” (1 Cor 10:13) that finally brings the trial to an end. “Time passes and much change doth bring And sets a bound to everything.” (CC p. 336)

All humans undergo temptation, even those who, like some Corinthians, think that they have special spiritual abilities. (TLSB)

GOD IS FAITHFUL – To His covenant promises; cf Dt 7:9; 34:4. (TLSB)

WAY OUT – τὴν ἔκβασιν—Fee notes that many translators and commentators skip the article. However, “the article with this word corresponds with ὁ πειρασμός to individualize each: ‘the temptation’ and ‘the way out.’” (CC p. 331)

Because God has promised to remain with His people, we are never left in a losing situation. His grace provides new opportunities for us to be faithful. “ ‘Lead us not into temptation’ ... refers to times when God gives us power and strength to resist the temptation [1 Corinthians 10:13]. However, the temptation is not taken away or removed. While we live in the flesh and have the devil around us, no one can escape his temptation and lures. It can only mean that we must endure trials—indeed, be engulfed in them [2 Timothy 2:3]. But we say this prayer so that we may not fall and be drowned in them. To feel temptation is, therefore, a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it” (LC III 106–7). See SC, Lord’s Prayer, pp xxxviii–xxxix. (TLSB)

stand up under it. Through God’s enablement to resist the temptation to sin. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 13:1-9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”** ⁶ Then he told this parable: **“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ⁸”** “Sir,” the man replied, **‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”**

This passage begins the second part of Jesus’ response to the crowds that began in 12:54–59. This second part (13:1–21) encompasses a call to repentance (13:1–9), Jesus’ second Sabbath controversy (13:10–17), and two parables of the kingdom (13:18–21), all of which give

examples of how the people must be discerning in their interpretation of “this critical time” (12:56). (CC p. 532)

Luke establishes a clear continuity between this pericope and the preceding one by recording that “at that same time” some who “were present” (παρῆσαν) reported about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. Thus this report comes from the same crowds who gathered in 12:1 and whom Jesus has been addressing since 12:54. Jesus is still speaking of examining the signs in “this critical time” (12:56). The themes of judgment and repentance (Law and Gospel) run through both 12:54–59 and 13:1–9. In this pericope, both judgment and forgiveness for the penitent are evident in the two separate but related segments, 13:1–5 (the blood of the Galileans and the tower of Siloam) and 13:6–9 (the parable of the fig tree). (CC pp. 532-533)

Jesus had been critical of the crowd following Him for their inability to interpret “this present time” (12:56). One senses that some in the crowd respond to this criticism by telling Jesus of the Galileans murdered by Pilate to suggest that are aware of how God does indeed punish sinners. They are not as dense as Jesus makes them out to be. They may falsely conclude that if nothing really bad happens to them in life, it is a sign that they have been living good lives and will be saved because of their good life. (PBC)

13:1 *the Galileans*. τῶν Γαλιλαίων—The use of the definite article with “Galileans” indicates that this is a specific group known to those involved with Jesus at this point. Since both Peter (22:59) and Jesus (23:6) were called Galileans, this would be particularly poignant for Jesus’ disciples. (CC p. 531)

In the previous passage, Jesus chided the crowds because they did not examine the signs of “this critical time” (12:56). Perhaps those present in the crowd thought that Pilate’s killing of the Galileans was such a sign, and they were proposing that Jesus interpret it. (Note that Jesus himself introduces the second example.) (CC p. 533)

The mixing of the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices was a heinous crime. The best explanation for such a bizarre sequence is the Passover context, for it provides the only occasion for laypeople to sacrifice in the temple precincts. Pilate violated all holiness codes by sending his troops into the temple area to murder Galilean Jews while they were slaughtering their lambs for the Passover Seder. During this holy feast the blood of these Jews was mixed with the blood of the lambs. (CC p. 533)

K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 75–76, evokes outrage at the sacrilege of this incident by offering a hypothetical modern equivalent:

A modernization of this same incident would be to go up into a Christian village in the Lebanese mountains and announce, “They came into the church with their machine guns and gunned down the faithful *in the very act of participating in the Holy Eucharist! The blood of the worshipers was mingled with the holy wine on the altar! NOW WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?!*” (CC p. 533)

Those who reported this incident probably hoped to elicit from Jesus a strong rebuke against Pilate and the Roman occupation of Israel. Perhaps they thought this incident was a sign that God's intervention to bring political freedom from Rome was near. But Jesus sees it in a religious context and speaks not of the sin of Pilate, but of the sin of the Jews—not just the martyred Galileans, but *all* of them. The issue here is not political, nor does it concern drawing a one-to-one correspondence between sin and suffering.

A cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering was a common doctrine among the Pharisees and one that Jesus has already encountered. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 553, notes: "In general the Pharisees believed that calamity was a punishment for sin." C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 145, says: "As any good Jew knows, trouble is God's punishment for sin, while tranquility is a sign of God's blessing." J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 719, refers to "the standard Jewish association of calamity and sin." L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211, notes: "In popular piety ... disaster is taken as punishment for sin." These commentators list passages such as Deuteronomy 28–30; Job 4:7; 8:20; chapter 22; Ps 1:4; Ezek 18:26; cf. Lk 5:20–24; Jn 9:1–3. The Pharisees' beliefs were based on their misunderstanding of OT passages such as these.

Some commentators have noted the resemblance between the theology of Job's "friends" and that of the Pharisees, though the theology of Job himself and his book is quite different. See T. Gorringer, "Job and the Pharisees," *Interpretation* 40, no. 1 (1986) 17–28. It must be stated that the theology of Deuteronomy as well as the other passages just cited is not a mechanical system of rewards for obedience and punishments for disobedience, but a theology of Law and Gospel in which human sin is overcome by divine grace. The promises of blessing and curse are eschatological, and so not necessarily fulfilled immediately or even in this life. (CC p. 533)

These Galileans were no more "sinners" (ἁμαρτωλοί) than the other Galileans, and their tragedy cannot be connected with any specific or exceptional sin. (CC pp. 533-534)

Neither the NT nor extrabiblical records shed light on this tragic event, which must have recently occurred. (TLSB)

13:2, 4 *worse sinners ... more guilty*. In ancient times it was often assumed that a calamity would befall only those who were extremely sinful (see Jn 9:1–2; see also Job 4:7; 22:5, where Eliphaz falsely accused Job). But Jesus pointed out that all are sinners who must repent or face a fearful end. (CSB)

Many thought that tragedies happened to people as divine punishments for specific sins. (TLSB)

Jesus says that these particular incidents of suffering and tragedy are not signs of God's judgment on individuals, but of his wrath against all sinful mankind. The signs of this time say that you are on the way to appear before the judge (12:54-59). And present on that journey is Jesus and his messianic ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God. All must repent and believe that the kingdom has come in Jesus. (CC p. 534)

13:3 I TELL YOU – On λέγω ὑμῖν, see comments at 4:24. This expression is used again in 13:5 and throughout this discourse. (Lk 12:4, 5, 8, 22, 27, 37, 44, 51) In this section, it begins Jesus’ responses to the two examples of suffering and tragedy, both of which he interprets as a call to repentance. (CC p. 531)

UNLESS YOU REPENT – Thus Jesus’ strong adversative, “No, I say to you” (13:3), introduces his call to repentance. Jesus says that these particular incidents of suffering and tragedy are not signs of God’s judgment on individuals, but of his wrath against all sinful humankind. The signs of this time say that *you* are on the way to appear before the judge (12:54–59). And present on that journey is *Jesus and his messianic ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God*. All must repent and believe that the kingdom has come in Jesus. That is exactly what John’s ministry called Israel to do. Jesus’ words remind the reader of John’s baptism of repentance (3:3) and his call for fruits of repentance (3:8) lest the tree be felled by the axe and the tree thrown into the fire (3:9). No less urgent is Jesus’ call for all to repent lest they perish (ἀπολεῖσθε) in sin as the Galileans did (see textual note on “perish” in 13:3). Repentance includes sorrow for sin and trust in the one who brings forgiveness and release (4:18). Jesus will explain that to rescue humanity from perishing, it is necessary (δεῖ) for *Jesus*, the Prophet, to “perish [ἀπολέσθαι] outside Jerusalem” (13:33). Suffering is connected to sin ultimately in Adam, whose sin precipitated all human suffering. But a son of Adam—the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God (3:23, 38), brings forgiveness and the promise of release from all suffering. To that end, Jesus will perish on behalf of all humankind, including also those Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. (CC p. 534)

Jesus uses this tragedy to spur His audience into self-examination and an honest assessment of their walk with God. If they do so, they will see that they might experience the same kind of misfortune. “The term *repentance* is not used in the Holy Scriptures in one and the same sense. In some passages of Holy Scripture it is used and taken to mean a person’s entire conversion” (FC SD V 7). (TLSB)

WILL ALL PERISH – ἀπολεῖσθε—This verb, used also in 13:5, often has the connotation of eschatological perdition, i.e., “to perish (in unforgiven sin).” (It does in 4:34; 6:9; 9:24–25, 56 [variant reading]; 15:4–9, 17, 24, 32; 17:27, 29, 33; 19:10; 20:16; 21:18; but not in 11:51; 13:33.). (CC p. 531)

13:4 *those eighteen*. Another unknown incident. (CSB)

ἐκεῖνοι οἱ δεκαοκτώ ... αὐτοὶ ὀφείλονται ἐγένοντο—The article, with the demonstrative pronoun, suggests that these eighteen were well known to Jesus’ hearers. They are the subject of ἐγένοντο and are referred to in the second clause by αὐτοὶ ὀφείλονται, placing them in the same category of “sinners” as the Galileans. (CC p. 532)

the tower in Siloam. Built inside the southeast section of Jerusalem’s wall. (CSB)

Another incident for which we have no other historical record. (TLSB)

ὁ πύργος ἐν τῷ Σιλωάμ—The tower of Siloam was in Jerusalem, so those killed in this incident were probably Judeans. The histories of the northern and southern regions were such that a

Jewish audience might assume that Galileans were more likely to be punished by God than Judeans. The northern region had a longer and more pronounced history of apostasy. Jesus' reply, citing Judeans, could imply that Galileans and Judeans were equally sinful in God's estimation. Tragic accidents can strike anyone, anywhere; none, including God's people (faithful or unfaithful) are exempt. The Galileans could well have been faithful pilgrims offering sacrifice in Jerusalem according to God's own instructions in the Torah, but that would not necessarily prevent suffering and tragedy from coming their way. (CC pp. 531-532)

After his response to the report about the Galileans, Jesus adds a word about the accident at the tower of Siloam. That accident closely parallels the story of the Galileans in its grammatical structure, showing the similarity between these two incidents. However, the Galileans suffered a tragedy caused by a human event; the eighteen from a tragedy with a natural cause. The Siloam incident evidently lacks political or religious overtones—no Roman villain or Jewish martyrs. (CC p. 534)

A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2 (Chicago: W. P. Blessing, 1912) 222, speculates, however, about possible historical connections:

A tower at the Siloam-Pool had fallen on eighteen persons and killed them, perhaps in connection with that construction of an aqueduct into Jerusalem by Pilate, which called forth, on the part of the Jews, the violent opposition, which the Roman so terribly avenged. As good Jews, they would probably think that the fall of the tower, which had buried in its ruins these eighteen persons, who were perhaps engaged in the building of that cursed structure, was a just judgment of God! For Pilate had used for it the sacred money which had been devoted to Temple-purposes (the *Qorban*), and many there were who perished in the tumult caused by the Jewish resistance to this act of profanation. (CC p. 534)

But Jesus describes it as a sign *just like* the preceding one. Jesus refers to the eighteen as “debtors” instead of using the term “sinners” as he did with the Galileans.

K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 78, notes:

In the first stanza we read of “sinners” [13:2] and in the third of “debtors” [13:4]. The same shift with the identical words can be found in the two versions of the Lord's Prayer. Matthew gives us, “Forgive us our *debts* as we forgive [our debtors]” (Matt. 6:12), and in Luke the same prayer is recorded, “Forgive us our *sins* as we forgive [everyone in debt to us]” (Luke 11:4). Marshall observes that the presence of these two words in parallel texts demonstrates the Semitic background of the story (Marshall, [The Gospel of Luke] 554). Simply stated, the first (debts) are the believer's unfulfilled duties in discipleship and obedience; the second (sins) are the overt evil acts that the believer commits. It has long been noted that the Aramaic word *hoba'*, which occurs in both texts in the Old Syriac, carries both meanings. ... we do have this two-sided nature of evil expressed in the words for sin that are parallel in these verses. The evil of which the political enthusiasts are urged to repent is described first as “sins” (v. 2) and then as “debts” (v. 4) (emphasis Bailey). (CC p. 535)

But Jesus' call to repentance here is in the same words as his call to repentance after the report of the Galileans (except that ὡσαύτως, "likewise" [13:5], replaces ὁμοίως, "in the same way" [13:3]). For Jesus, any such tragedy should be seen *not* as a sign of God's judgment *on specific people for specific sins*, but as a sign of his judgment of *all people*. Jesus calls not for speculation, but for contrition and faith. His summons here is for *all of you* to repent lest *you* perish (13:5). The correct interpretation involves judging "what is righteous" (12:57). The Christian conclusion is not "they must have deserved it," but rather, "I deserved the same," yet also, "Thank God that Jesus perished on behalf of me and of all, so that I might not perish eternally." (CC p. 535)

GUILTY – ὀφειλέται—Literally "debtors," this is a synonym for ἁμαρτωλοί, "sinners," in 13:2. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus spoke of forgiving "everyone owing debt" (11:4; ὀφείλοντι). (CC p. 532)

13:1–5 Jesus points out tragedies as occasions for self-examination and reflection on our sinful frailty. Contrary to popular thought, tragedy does not always strike people because they somehow deserve it. Rather, in His wisdom God allows and uses even tragic events to warn of judgment, that He might bring us to repentance and eternal life through faith in Jesus. • Lord, increase my faith in what You have given me to know. Grant me humility before those mysteries that surpass my understanding. Amen. (TLSB)

13:6 *fig tree*. Probably refers to the Jewish nation (see note on Mk 11:14), but it may also apply to the individual soul. (CSB)

This unproductive tree symbolizes Jews who were not producing the fruit of faith. (TLSB)

συκῆν—It would not be unusual to find a fig tree in a vineyard. (Cf. Joel 2:22; Micah 4:4; Hos 9:10; Zech 3:10) (CC p. 532)

Jesus' parable of the fig tree supports his call to repentance by illustrating how God will be patient—for a little while longer—with a community that does not yield the fruit of repentance. The Christian catechumen will again be reminded of John's exhortations to produce fruits corresponding to repentance before the tree is cut down at the root and thrown into the fire (3:8–9). "This generation" (11:50), a "brood of vipers" (3:7), has signs to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. God's forbearing patience is meant to give them opportunity to repent (cf. Rom 2:4; 3:25–26; 2 Pet 3:9). The focus is on whether there will be fruit (repentance) before removal (destruction in the final judgment). (CC p. 535)

A VINEYARD – Symbol of Israel, God's chosen people (cf. Is 5:1–7; Mt 21:33–46). (TLSB)

Both a vineyard and a fig tree are common OT metaphors for Israel. (E.g., Is 5:1–7; Jer 8:13; 24:1–10; Hos 9:10; Micah 7:1) In Jesus' parable the fig tree is planted *in the vineyard*, and this has led some interpreters to suggest that the tree might represent a group *within* Israel, such as the leadership. However, the audience for this parable still seems to be the crowds (Lk 12:54), and it would be contrary to the message of the whole pericope for any individual or group to deflect Jesus' call to repentance by applying it to another instead of to oneself. Jesus' words are

pointedly addressed to any and all hearers. But they certainly had particular pertinence for Jesus' immediate audience. (CC pp. 535-536)

WENT TO LOOK – ἦλθεν ζητῶν—The emphasis is on continual seeking. This same participle will be repeated in the next verse (13:7; ἔρχομαι ζητῶν). (CC p. 532)

13:7 The owner symbolizes God; the vinedresser represents a religious leader. (TLSB)

For three years. A period of ample opportunity. (CSB)

Very patient, giving his plant every opportunity to produce fruit. (TLSB)

The Jews, led by the religious establishment of Israel, need to listen to Jesus' catechesis, read the signs of this critical time, and bear fruits of repentance, as John called them to do in his ministry (3:8–9). So far they have been a recalcitrant generation and have not produced fruit. For three years—perhaps an allusion to the length of Jesus' earthly ministry—God has looked for fruits of repentance, a sign that his patience is justified, but now the judgment of God is demanding that they be dug up so that there might be more room in the vineyard for other trees that might bear fruit. (CC p. 536)

K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 82, gives some helpful background on the meaning of the three years:

The common understanding of the time sequence is that the tree would have three years in which to grow. Then for three years the fruit was considered forbidden, according to [Leviticus 19:23](#). The fruit of the fourth year (that is, the seventh year of the tree's life) was considered clean and was offered to the Lord ([Lev. 19:24](#)). The details in this brief parable are scanty, but the probable intent is that the master is seeking this seventh-year fruit specified in [Leviticus 19:23](#) as an offering to the Lord. Indeed, he has been seeking it for three years. ... Thus for three years he sought the first fruits and has been disappointed three times. Now nine years have passed since the planting of the tree. The situation seems hopeless. ... The master has waited patiently, long beyond the expected time of fruit-bearing. (CC p. 53[^])

The clearing of the ground for others may be an allusion to the incorporation of Gentiles into the Israel of God (cf. Romans 9–11). (CC p. 536)

CUT IT DOWN – ἔκκοπον [οὖν] αὐτήν—In the East, “cut *out*, dig *out*” is the idiom for removing trees. Cf. 3:9, where the ax is laid at *the root* of the tree. (CC p. 532)

13:8 Augustine: “The gardener who intercedes, is every saint who within the Church prays for those who are without the Church” (*NPNF* 1 6:444). (TLSB)

LEAVE IT ALONE – ἄφες—The verb ἀφήμι and the noun ἄφεσις often denote the forgiveness of sins. See textual note and comments at 4:18. However, the passage here refers to God's patience and forbearance. The people represented by the tree do not actually receive the forgiveness of their sins (subjective justification) unless they are brought to repentance and faith in Jesus. Hence the verb here means “leave, let alone, tolerate.” (CC p. 532)

The vinedresser intercedes to gain yet another period of time when the tree might receive nourishment from an outside source. The intercession suggests that the vinedresser may represent Jesus himself as well as the early apostolic mission to the Jews, but certainly all who proclaim the Gospel of God's merciful clemency in Jesus and who prayerfully intercede for the perishing are carrying out the role of the vinedresser. "The *vinedresser* must act to save the tree and at the same time the tree must respond to those acts or they are of no avail." All who are alive—Jews and Gentiles—now have time to see and hear that God's judgment falls on Jesus at Calvary and that is the basis for the hope of the penitent (see comments on 12:49–50). *The themes of judgment and mercy must always be viewed through the lens of God's judgment on Jesus and God's mercy on humankind through him.* Only this Gospel has the power to bring forth fruits of repentance. For those who remain fruitless after Jesus' departure into the heavenly places and his abiding presence in the church's life, the time of judgment will come. It came for the Jewish religious establishment in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, if this warning applies to Israel, the original tree in God's vineyard, how much more should Jesus' words be taken to heart by the church, particularly Gentile Christians, who have been transplanted in at the expense of others (cf. Romans 11). (CC pp. 536)

Ultimately, then, Jesus' words are not about Israel's obduracy, nor the hubris of Pilate and the other Romans. Neither does Jesus address the age-old debate about a correspondence between individual sin and individual punishment (cf. the book of Job). Rather, Jesus speaks of sin and judgment in terms of all humankind and tells the parable of the fig tree to explain the proper way to understand God's mercy. Jesus calls for repentance and reveals God's merciful forbearance during "this critical time" (12:56). *Anyone* who does not repent will perish (13:5). (CC p. 537)

Yet the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ is also *for anyone and everyone*. That Gospel offers comfort and hope even when God's justice remains hidden in a world of sin, suffering, and death. One must "examine this critical time" (12:56) to see that one's own judgment is imminent and so flee through repentance into the kingdom that is coming through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of God's Son. One must view massacres and accidents from the perspective of the cross. The forgiveness of sins is present in the risen One, who *remains* present in his church through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. It is here that the suffering Christian meets the suffering Christ and sees in Christ's sufferings his own comfort, his peace, his redemption, and his life everlasting after his "release" (4:18) from every pain in this world. (CC p. 537)

DIG AROUND AND FERTILIZE – The best way to fertilize the tree, that it might bear fruit. Aug: "The basket of dung understand in its good effects. It is filthy, but it produces fruit. The gardener's filth is the sinner's sorrows. They who repent, repent in filthy robes; if, that is, they understand aright, and repent in truth" (*NPNF* 1 6:444). (TLSB)

13:9 The people hearing Jesus may still have time to repent and trust in Him. If they do not, they will face God's wrath and eternal destruction. (TLSB)

The Faithful Gardener

And he answered him, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.” Luke 13:8

Robbers Die in Getaway Crash,” the headline reads. “Just what they deserved,” we say. Jesus says, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). “Not fair! We’re not the bad guys!” Jesus: “Oh, but you are.” We are “bad guys” because of sin. We deserve the robbers’ fate. Jesus warns against justifying ourselves by thinking there are worse sinners. You know the saying “I’m not as bad as so-and-so.” Paul’s saying is better. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). In acknowledging himself as a bad guy, Paul points to the Good Guy. Our salvation does not depend on our being better than so-and-so, but on our good and faithful Savior. That leads to Jesus’ parable. The parable is about a bad tree. More important, it’s about a good and faithful gardener. The gardener’s faithful pleading pictures Jesus interceding with the Father on our behalf. The gardener’s faithful toil pictures Jesus patiently working in our lives to bring us to repentance, faith, and fruitful living. He points us to the tree of the cross, where He forgave us our “badness” and gave us His goodness.

Jesus, thank You for Your patient and faithful work in my life. Amen.

13:6–9 Jesus warns that His audience needs to begin producing works consistent with the Gospel. Today, many fail to live their lives according to God’s will. The One who commands us to such works also bestows His Spirit. He enables us to repent and to produce the fruit that flow from His salvation. • Lord, show me the shortness of my time and the nearness of eternity, so I do not fail to redeem the time. Amen. (TLSB)