

**<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup>They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.**

**<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup>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.” <sup>8</sup>We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup>We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup>And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.**

**<sup>11</sup>These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! <sup>13</sup>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.**

The year was 1812. Napoleon Bonaparte, in just a few years, had taken control of almost all of continental Europe. His army seemed unstoppable. In summer of 1812, he led a fighting force 400,000 strong to attack his former ally, Russia. He expected a quick, decisive victory. It didn’t happen. Months later, with the fighting still raging, winter set in. His troops weren’t prepared for the cold. It’s said the Russian winter killed more than the Russian army that year – thousands froze to death each day. It was the beginning of the end for Bonaparte.

The year was 1941. Adolf Hitler, in just a few years, had taken control of almost all of continental Europe. His army seemed unstoppable. In summer of 1941, he sent a fighting force 3,000,000 strong to attack his former ally, Russia. He expected a quick, decisive victory. It didn’t happen. Months later, with the fighting still raging, winter set in. His troops weren’t prepared for the cold. It’s said the Russian winter killed more than the Russian army that year – thousands froze to death each day. It was the beginning of the end for Adolph Hitler.

It’s just one example of many that have led people to coin the common phrase: “Those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” You’ve heard it before, right? “Those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

God has a similar message for you this morning. Paul writes to the Corinthians about Israel’s history. The examples he cites aren’t failed military campaigns with high casualties; he cites people falling from faith with even higher spiritual casualties. And he says it’s vital that believers today learn from this history so we do not repeat it. He has a warning for us, and also a powerful encouragement, as we learn a lesson from history\_this morning.

The year was 1446BC. In just a few months, God had brought the world’s superpower – Egypt – to its knees and set Israel free. With him at their side, Israel seemed unstoppable. By

summer of that year, God was leading a nation well over a million strong to the land he'd promised them. They all expected a quick, decisive march through the wilderness to Canaan.

That didn't happen. 40 years later, their kids were still wandering in the wilderness. But the generation that came out of Egypt? Of those million or so Israelites who were 20 and older, do you know how many were still alive? Two. Like Paul says here: **God was not pleased with the rest of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.** What went wrong?

Well, it's not like God was stingy in loving them. A point Paul makes abundantly clear here is just how richly God blessed them, how much of God's saving love they had experienced firsthand. **They were all under the cloud**, he says. God in a pillar of cloud hovered over them 24/7 to guide and protect them. **They all passed through the Red sea** – one wall of water on each side, them on dry ground. They all saw God bring that same water crashing down on Pharaoh's army to save them. They all tasted his love in the manna he sent 6 days a week for forty years...in the water he gushed out of rocks for them. Such clear evidence that they were God's chosen people, and he loved them with all his heart.

But...did you hear Paul hinting at the fact that you are every bit as blessed as they? He called that Red Sea incident a **baptism...** You can't help but think of yours. When God used water and word to save you not from Pharaoh's army but from sin and death and made you his. He talked about **spiritual food and drink** – can't help but think all the times you've tasted God's love in Christ's body and blood for your forgiveness. In fact, Paul says we're even more blessed in a sense – we **on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come**. Israel had a promise of a Savior; but God has shown you time and again the fulfillment, Christ-crucified for your sins. Such clear evidence that you're God's people, and he loves you with all his heart.

But then there's that abrupt: **Nevertheless.** Nevertheless, their bodies lined the desert. How could an Israel so obviously loved by God fall away from him? You get a hint of what happened in Paul's application of the history lesson: **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** They didn't fall because they were worse sinners than us, or because God was stingy with his love. They fell because they didn't think they ever would.

They were **standing firm**, they thought. They assumed that the fact God made it so clear they were his chosen people meant they would *always* be his people. And so they **weren't careful**. They grew complacent about sin – didn't take struggling against it, saying no to it all that seriously. "After all, God will forgive us." And soon, their hearts were **set on** sin. Paul gives four specific examples of that – they worshiped the Golden calf; they slept around with Moabite women; they complained about their food; they grumbled against God's leaders. They fell away from faith, fell under God's judgment.

Paul wants us to learn from Israel's history: **We don't want you to be ignorant of these things**, he says. And it's not enough to just know what happened to Israel. Hitler and his generals knew what happened to Napoleon's army on his campaign in Russia; they studied every detail of it before launching theirs. The problem was: They thought the same thing would never happen to them.

Paul was under no such delusion. **These things happened as examples and warnings for us.** Not "you" – **us**. Paul, the apostle, recognized he was every bit as capable of falling as Israel was.

What about you? Do you assume that the fact that you have faith in Jesus now means you always will? Do you think that other weaker Christians might fall away, but it's not much of a danger for you? Do you presume that all God's love you've experienced – "I'm baptized. I know

my bible pretty well. Been a member here for years” – means you’ll never leave him? That you’ve reached a point in your faith that you no longer have to guard very closely your heart or life?

Then learn from Israel’s history exactly where that attitude leads: Complacent toward sin. Not taking the struggle against it all that seriously. Maybe you can think of sins that’s beginning to happen with in your life, temptations not too unlike Israel faced that you’re not resisting much anymore: Materialism, lust, discontent with what you have...or anger or worry. Maybe it used to bother you, but it no longer does. Maybe you’re using God’s forgiveness as an excuse not to struggle against it anymore, with a false sense of security that you’re okay. **If you think you’re standing firm** like that, Paul says, you’re on the verge of falling. And he points to a million plus bodies in the desert as proof.

But God does that because he loves you. He warns to shake you out of self-security so that he can give you real security. And it’s here – in these verses. 1 million plus bodies isn’t the only statistic Paul quotes. There’s another: 100%. You find it in the last verse here: “**God is faithful.**” Here’s the history lesson above all others that God would have you learn today. God is faithful, 100% of the time. The whole bible testifies to it. You see that in Israel’s history, too. In spite of how they trampled all over his love, he didn’t stop loving. In spite of the fact that so many stopped caring about his Promised Savior, he never went back on his word. He faithfully stuck with Israel for the next 1,500 years...so that he could keep his promise...for them, and for you. And he did.

Jesus came, just like God said he would. And he faithfully carried out the mission God sent him to carry out. He was sent to win your righteousness – and he never fell into temptation, never sinned, and won it for you, 100%. He was sent to pay for your sins – and he went to the cross, and suffered your eternal punishment for all of your sins, taking them all away, 100%. All of the times you’ve resisted temptation and failed, and all the times you’ve failed to resist temptation, all of your complacency, it’s been paid for by that one sacrifice.

Friends, God is still faithful. He’s made a promise to you to fully and freely forgive your sins for the sake of the Savior he sent. And he hasn’t changed his mind about that, and he never will. Christ was the Rock who accompanied them, and Christ is the Rock who still accompanies you this morning. He’s with you to forgive your sins, 100% of them, all of them, this morning.

And he’s with you in temptation, too – 100%. No, you aren’t condemned to repeat Israel’s history! In no way, shape, or form, because, “God is faithful!” When you are tempted, he’ll provide a way to do what is right – always. Not only that. He’ll provide the strength to take that way out, to stand up under it, to resist temptation. Christ the Rock is with you to faithfully do that for you every single day in every single temptation, 100%.

It almost seems like a contradiction, doesn’t it? First Paul says, “Be careful – watch out, lest you fall!” Then he says, “Don’t worry! God is faithful!” So...which is it? Be careful, or don’t worry? Both! It seems like a contradiction but it’s what we always need – both messages – because we are walking contradictions. We are sinners, but we are saints. A part of us wants to live complacently ignorant to spiritual dangers, thinking we’re standing firm in our faith, using God’s love as an excuse to sin. Then we need the warning: If you think you are standing firm like that, you are standing on the brink of a cliff that lands you in hell. But when that message has sunk in...when we realize how close we are to the edge, how weak we are to stand firm on our own, how often we fail in temptation...then we need to hear this beautiful truth: “Don’t worry. God is faithful. Have no fear...the pit of hell is one Jesus suffered in your place, so that you’ll never have to. Your sins are forgiven. Christ is with you when you are tempted. And he won’t let go of you until he brings you to heaven.”

God grant that learn this history lesson. That we take it to heart – the warning and the assurance – not just today, but every day, so that, standing firm on Christ our Rock, we will never fall...until he brings us safely to the Promised Land. Amen.