

Pentecost 11  
1 Corinthians 10: 1-5, 11-13  
August 16, 2009

Dear People upon whom the fulfillment of the ages has come!

These verses use Israel's real history to illustrate an important warning and lesson to New Testament Christians. Similarly, Paul had already used the example of a runner in a race to encourage Christians to dedicated self-denial as they ran their faith/life to the finish line. Considering what the finish line of the Christian faith stands for – crossing into heaven with Jesus – not finishing the race is a serious matter. Paul was concerned about some of the Christians in Corinth. There were many temptations not to be serious about self-denial, temptations to flirt with sin, to see how close one could get to the fire without getting burned. Would some of them end up like so many of their spiritual forefathers had? Might they fail to finish the race?

So we too need to take these matters seriously, too!

All Temptations Can Be Defeated (and need to be). Hold onto God's Faithful Promise!

God blessed Israel. Paul refers to Israel's history right after God saved them out of Egypt and got them on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. In that land, God would continue to work out His promised blessing of a Savior for all nations.

In fact, in these verses we see a time during which God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give their descendants, the children of Israel, the land of Canaan as their very own. That would be the actual location for the coming of the promised Savior, where He would be born, where He would live in perfect holiness and righteousness for the world, where He would willingly lay down His sinless, divine life in the flesh in our place to earn full forgiveness for all people – God so loved the world – where He would rise from the dead on the third day for our assurance of forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation, rescue.

In those days, God was making big steps in keeping His greatest promise.

In getting them start, God made His merciful, kind, loving, saving presence visible to them in the form of that pillar cloud. In English, it is a negative thing to say someone is under a cloud. But for those Israelites, being under THE cloud was a great blessing. It meant they were under God's loving, saving protection. God, their Savior and Redeemer, was with them. He also showed them the way. He led them on their way to the Promised Land.

Just as they were getting started on that way, Pharaohs' army came chasing after them. Pharaoh wanted to enslave them again. But God brought His people, through Moses, safely across the Red Sea on dry ground even as the LORD wiped out the enemy army completely!

After that, God continues to sustain them. Still present with them, He provided them spiritual food and spiritual drink. It was the manna and the water from the rocks. Paul names it spiritual food and drink because God Himself gave it to them by His miraculous power. Paul points out, however, that another very real but far greater Rock was there. It was Christ Himself. Jesus, before His birth as a human being, always was God, the Son. It wasn't the rocks themselves – it happened on two occasions – that gave the water, of course. It was the Lord Himself who caused those rocks to be able to do that. On the first occasion, in fact, the Lord told Moses (Exodus 17:6) “I will stand there before you by (on) the rock at Horeb.” Paul assures us here that it was the eternal Son, the LORD, who was there giving them water. With His blessings of manna and this water, Jesus was directing the hearts of Israel to Himself as their Savior and Provider. You heard Jesus Himself tell the people that He was the real manna from heaven who'd give them life, eternal life. By faith in Jesus our souls are fed unto eternal life.

Five times St. Paul tells us that all those people were blessed in all these ways, then the sorrowful statement. Nonetheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. They never made it into Canaan!

Idolatry, adultery, doubting God's promises, grumbling and complaining, and thus questioning the Lord's love, power, and wisdom, they dies before they ever got into Canaan.

Clearly, God wanted the Corinthians to learn something from all of this. God wants us to learn it, too! We can participate in God's great Gospel blessings and fall. We can fall for temptations. We can desire what is evil. Watch Out! Deny self!

What God did for Old Testament Israel were type, were illustrations, were examples of even greater things He has done for us. Paul purposely used the words “baptized into Moses,” to remind us of the even more wonderful blessings of (Christ's) baptism, which joins us to Jesus Himself, especially to His forgiveness a new life, getting us on our way to heaven, and it's no accident that the Apostle by the end of this same chapter and on into the next teaches us about the Lord's Supper, an even greater eating and drinking by the miraculous power of Jesus through His own words, “Take and eat. Take and drink. This (bread) is My body given for you. This cup is My blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” There is the Gospel.

We have been and are being blessed with Jesus' presence and with His Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Now, let's devote ourselves to denying self and following Jesus. Let us not be lazy or reckless and throw ourselves into temptations.

Temptations have come and will continue to come, but God intends to strengthen us so that we can bear up under them. He will also provide a way out of all temptations. You know that way. God is faithful. Hold to His promises, such as these. Many a Christian in sickness, in loss, in pain, in all kinds of trouble, in persecution, in resisting satan's lies and the world's empty was of life have not given up by holding onto these promises. God is faithful. He will keep His promises. For Jesus' sake, God is bringing us to

heaven, Jesus accompanying us all the way. Say “yes” to God; say “no” to temptation!  
Amen.