

THE WARNING EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL

1 CORINTHIANS 10:01–13

Introduction

The security of the believer is one of the great doctrines of the Scripture. Unfortunately, the doctrine has too often been preached and taught with *an inadequate understanding of the doctrine and to the neglect of the warnings of Scripture*.

The result has been tragic, for it has brought multitudes into the church who have not been genuinely converted to Christ, and it has given them a sense of *false security* and *over-confidence*. Multitudes think they are Christians and followers of Christ, but their lives do not match their profession.

Two of the greatest problems facing the church today are those of false security and over-confidence. But Scripture is clear...

- A person may think and say he is saved, but he may be wrong. Saying and thinking do not make a person safe and secure in Christ. Saying and thinking are not the reality or the evidence of salvation.
- A person may be baptized and belong to a church, but baptism and membership in a church do not make a person safe and secure in Christ.
- A person may partake of the Lord's supper or sacrament and think he is thereby safe and secure in Christ, but partaking of the bread and wine do not make a person safe and secure in Christ.
- A person may sense the presence of a *supernatural being*, or be greatly gifted and very active in the church, but it is not these things that make a person safe and secure in Christ.

This was the problem with the Corinthian believers. All of these things were true of them, and they felt safe and secure in Christ. But they were wrong, and they needed to be strongly warned lest they be doomed.

The previous passage had made the point clear. The Christian believer is in a race for the eternal crown (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The crown of life is not given to a person on a *silver platter*. A person must *run* to win the race: run in discipline, denying himself and straining to control his life for Christ. If he does not so run, he will become disqualified (cp. 1 Cor. 9:27).

This passage enforces the point. Paul uses the nation of Israel as a prime example. Israel had been greatly privileged by God — in every way imaginable — and if any people ever felt safe and secure, Israel did. Yet, the people perished in the wilderness outside the promised land (heaven). Believers who feel safe and secure are warned by the example of Israel.

- I. The example of Israel: all shared the blessings of God (vv. 1-5).
- II. The warning (vv. 6-10).
- III. The point: receive the warning (vv. 11-13).

I. *1 Corinthians 10:01–05 Unfaithfulness of Israel*

The example of Israel. *All Israel* shared in the blessings and privileges of God. The word “all” is emphasized. *All* left Egypt (a type of the world) and began the journey to the promised land (a type of heaven). *All* began to walk through the wilderness of the world with those who truly believed and trusted God; but, as became evident, all were not genuine. They did not truly believe and trust. They felt safe and secure because they were journeying with those who were travelling to the promised land. But they were still in the wilderness, not in the promised land. And the wilderness included all kinds of dangers that had to be confronted and conquered or else they would be destroyed by the wilderness.

Israel had five remarkable blessings and privileges as they journeyed to the promised land. God saw to it that the believers had what was necessary to journey through the wilderness of life.

1. Israel had the cloud of God’s presence. This refers to God’s presence and guidance.

Exo 13:21-22 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (cp. Exo. 14:19; 24:15; 34:5)

2. Israel passed through the Red Sea. This refers to the great deliverance of God from the bondages and enslavements of Egypt which were a symbol of the world (cp. Exo. 14:13-31).
3. Israel was baptized into Moses and his leadership. Moses stood as a type of Christ. God gave Israel the leader it needed to reach the promised land. Therefore, any person who followed Moses through the Red Sea and under the cloud was baptized, immersed and given over to Moses and his mission. The person was proclaiming that he was a follower of Moses and his mission to reach the promised land.
4. Israel partook of the food and water of God’s provision. The word “spiritual” simply means that the food and water came from God. God provided for their needs; He took care of their day-to-day necessities (Exo. 16:4-8, 11-15; Exo. 17:6; Num. 20:1f).
5. Israel had the presence of Christ. Note how Christ is said to have been present with Israel. The rock that provided water for Israel is said to have been Christ. Jesus Christ was the Source, the energy, the power, the Person who...
 - caused the rock to gush forth water.
 - caused the Red Sea to roll back.

- caused the cloud to guide Israel and to rain manna or bread.
- gave Moses and the promise of the promised land to the people.

Note how Paul is proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Jehovah of the Old Testament, the One who is called “the Rock” (Deu. 32:4; 18:30-31; 2 Sam. 22:2; Psa. 18:2; 92:15; etc.). It was He, our Lord and Saviour, who was guiding and providing for Israel through its wilderness journey toward the promised land.

However, what happened to most of the believers of Israel is tragic. There were over six-hundred thousand men alone who broke away from the enslavements of Egypt and began the journey to the promised land. This means that including the women and children there were well over two million who stepped out to follow God to the promised land (cp. Exo. 12:37; Num. 1:46). But the critical question is this:

=> How many remained faithful to God through the wilderness journey? How many actually turned away from the fleshly desires aroused by the delicious foods, drinks and bodily stimulations of Egypt and the world? How many actually disciplined their bodies, subjected their desires, and kept their eyes and hearts upon the promised land? How many were faithful and steadfast, unmovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord until they reached the promised land? Remember over two million began the journey: How many entered the promised land? *Only two! Caleb and Joshua.* Caleb and Joshua alone remained faithful to God. Only two did not sin and displease God. Everyone else, over two to three million, perished in the wilderness. They were overthrown or “scattered” (*katastronnumi*), that is, rejected by God and craving after evil things scattered as corpses all over the wilderness. Why? Because they did not please God.

Zec 1:2-3 “The LORD was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

Zec 1:15 ‘But I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.’

II. 1 Corinthians 10:06–10 Warning to Believers

The warning to the church and to its believers. Scripture says explicitly, what happened to Israel is a warning, an example to us. We face danger, great danger: what happened to the believers of Israel can happen to us. If it does, then the doom that fell upon the believers of Israel will fall upon us. It is critical, therefore, to know what caused the believers of Israel to be destroyed and what kept them from entering the promised land.

1. There was the sin of lust, rejected by God and of craving after evil things. We must not crave after evil things as they did. They lusted and craved for the delicious foods of Egypt (Num. 11:4f). As a result of the lust, a plague broke out among the people and

killed many of them. In fact, so many died that the place became known as “the grave of greediness or of lust” (Num. 11:34).

The lust of those believers is a strong warning to us: we must not “set our hearts on evil things [worldly pleasures]” (v. 6).

Mark 4:19 *“But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”*

Eph 2:3 *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

1 Th 4:4-5 *That each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.*

2 Tim 2:22 *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

James 1:15 *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

James 4:2 *You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.*

1 Pet 2:11 *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

2. There was the sin of idolatry. When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law, the people became restless waiting for the Word of God. Therefore, they decided to go ahead and create their own form of worship (cp. Exo. 32:1f). It should be noted that the people were actually dedicating their worship to God Himself.

Exo 32:5 *When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.”*

The point to see is this: the image of the golden calf was only to help them picture and imagine God. They felt the need for some image to help them in their worship of Jehovah. Note the reference to eating, drinking and revelry (immoral play). Such behaviour often accompanies idolatry, the worship of a self-made god created by a person’s own mind.

This was the danger the Corinthian believers faced. If they participated in the social functions of unbelievers, they might fall into sin. Whether the function was held in the temple or in the homes of the unbelievers, the likelihood was they would slip into the same idolatrous behaviour of the unbelievers. (See 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9.)

1 John 5:21 *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Deu 11:16 *Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.*

Isa 42:8 *“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”*

3. There was the sin of sexual immorality. This was a gross sin of some of the believers of Israel. Over twenty thousand of them committed immorality with their neighbors and as a result they were judged and condemned to destruction, banned from the promised land (cp. Num. 25:1-9). (See 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9.)

Rom 1:27 *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

1 Cor 6:9 *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders.*

Gal 5:19, 21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;...and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Eph 4:19 *Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

Eph 5:3 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.*

1 Th 4:3 *It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.*

Jude 1:4, 7 *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

4. There was the sin of tempting Christ. The word “test” (peirazo) means to try the Lord’s patience; to see how far a person can go; to tempt the patience of Christ. The believers of Israel...

- often felt that God and His leader Moses *demanded and expected too much*.
- often longed for the things of the flesh which they had formerly known in Egypt (the world).

They became discontent with the things God provided, and longed to return to Egypt (the world). Therefore, many of them perished in the wilderness and were not allowed to enter the promised land.

Thought 1. Believers often feel that God expects too much, that they are missing out on something in the world. They often feel that God will forgive them...

- even if they do look
- even if they do taste
- even if they do touch
- even if they do slip a little
- even if they do hold back a little

James 4:13 *Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”*

Deu 6:16 *Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.*

5. There was the sin of complaining and grumbling. Some of the believers in Israel were always complaining against God and Moses (cp. Num. 14:2, 36; 16:11, 41). The result was judgment and punishment by the destroyer, that is, an angel sent by God to execute judgment. They perished in the wilderness and never saw the promised land. (Cp. Exo. 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 11:1; 14:27; 20:3; 21:5.)

Thought 1. How many believers grumble and gripe? How many become dissatisfied...

- with the direction God gives through His leaders?
- with the food God gives through His leaders?
- with the way God guides through His leaders?
- with the words God gives to His leaders?

How many voice their complaints to others? The warning is clear to the believers of God’s church.

1 Cor 10:10 *And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.*

Jude 1:16 *These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.*

Phil 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing.

Exo 15:24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

Psa 77:3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

Prov 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

Lam 3:39 Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?

III. 1 Corinthians 10:11–13 Heed the Warning

The point is unequivocal — receive the warning. The things that happened to the believers of Israel are examples and warnings to us. We must heed them for three reasons.

1. The end or climax of the world (age) has come upon us. Since Christ, believers are living in the last age or period of human history. This simply means that Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God, the only way God will ever deal with men again. Men must now approach God by faith in Christ.

This age is what is known as the age of grace, grace being the way God now deals with men. The age of Christ or of grace is the last age of human history. Therefore, since we are living in the last age, we must heed the warning example of Israel.

2. A person can fall, especially if he *begins to think* that he stands, that is, if he *begins to feel* safe and secure. Note this verse, for it is a straightforward warning that is usually neglected and ignored: "If you think you are standing firm [safe and secure] be careful that you don't fall!"

Luke 18:9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

1 Cor 8:2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

1 Cor 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Gal 6:3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Prov 20:6 Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 28:26 He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

Isa 47:8-10 "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.'"

3. There is a way to escape temptation, but to escape temptation the believer must know three great truths.
 - a. All temptation is common to man (anthropinos). The word means *a human* temptation that falls to the lot of man. This is an amazing promise. Think about it. No temptation...
 - is superhuman
 - is unique
 - is beyond man's capacity to handle
 - is terrifying in any sense of the word

Every single temptation that attacks the believer is *common to all men*. *All men* face the same temptation. This means a wonderful thing: some men have already overcome it. Yes, many fell, caved in to the temptation: but some demonstrated the will and energy to overcome it.

- b. God is faithful: He limits the temptation. He does not allow a temptation to confront a believer that is...
 - too enticing
 - too stimulating
 - too ego-boosting
 - too promising
 - too self-exalting
 - too pleasing
 - too fulfilling
 - too satisfying
 - too forceful
 - too attractive
 - too appealing
 - too arousing

God knows *what* we can bear and *how much* we can bear; therefore, He limits every single temptation within our limits to overcome it. God is faithful.

1 Cor 1:9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Deu 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

2 Chr 16:9 "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

Psa 36:5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

Psa 89:1 A maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.

Psa 91:4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

- c. God provides a way to escape. He always makes an escape route, a way out of the temptation. He always gives us the strength and energy to walk through or over the temptation or else to turn and flee from it.

Luke 10:19 *“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”*

Rom 16:20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

1 Cor 10:13 *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.*

Heb 2:18 *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Rev 3:21 *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

Prov 15:19 *The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.*

Isa 30:21 *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*

Isa 42:16 *I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.*

Isa 43:16 *This is what the LORD says — he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters. ■*