

A Tale of Two Fates

1 Cor 10:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Some years ago in Virginia lived a woman whose story was told by her physician in the *Virginia Medical Monthly*.
1. She had grown normally, married, and had three children.
 - a. Life was normal until the husband and father died when the children were in high school.
 - b. The mother doubled her devotion to the children. She changed her clothes to those of a girl of twenty, joined in her children's parties and fun.
 2. In a few years the children noticed that as they grew older their mother was growing younger.
 - a. Psychiatrists call it "personality regression," which means "a person walking backward."
 - b. Usually such people stop going backward at a certain age.
 3. But not this woman.
 - a. She slipped backward at the rate of one year for every three or four months of time that went forward.
 - Finally, although she was 61 years old she acted and talked like a 6-year-old.
 - She was sent to an institution, where she insisted on wearing short dresses, playing with toys, and babbling like a child.
 - b. Then she became like a three-year-old; she spilled her food, crawled on the floor, and cried "Mama."
 - Backward still farther to the age of one, she drank milk in a bottle like a tiny baby.
 - Finally, she went back over the line and died.
- B. What a horrible way to die!
- C. This morning's text is about "spiritual regression," going from a solid spiritual position to a compromised spiritual position.
1. The context of this passage continues to be the eating of meat sacrificed to idols.
 - a. That's apparent, for the apostle mentions two ways specifically that the Israelites were unfaithful: sexual immorality and idolatry. Paul writes: "Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day" (vv. 7-8).
 - b. It seems to me that from chapter 5:1 to 11:1 Paul only discusses two issues—sexuality and idolatry.
 - Sexuality: the man living with his step-mother (chapter 5), the lawsuit (6:1-11)—because it comes between two passages dealing with sexual immorality—likely dealt with immorality (viz., the man and his step-mother), the instruction to flee sexual immorality (6:12-20), and the instructions for husbands and wives to be sexually active with one another in order to conquer the world's temptations (chapter 7).
 - Meat offered to idols: the problem (chapter 8) and the example of Paul's giving up his rights (chapter 9).
 - c. Now in this passage, Paul gives an example of both paganism and sexual immorality from Israelite history.
 - The likely reason that Paul discusses sexual immorality and meat offered to idols in such close proximity in this book and then discusses both activities in this one passage is that they were both forms of pagan worship in the ancient world.
 - Thus, if you went to a pagan temple, not only would you find priests cooking meat in sacrifice and people eating that food, you would also find prostitutes who would engage in their trade with the worshipers as a form of sacrifice to the deity.
 2. The problem Paul addresses, thus, is that just as the Israelites fell through immorality and paganism, the strong in Corinth were placing themselves in grave danger of falling.
 3. What does this text say about falling away? Paul speaks of SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS & SPIRITUAL BANISHMENT.

II. SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS, vv. 1-4.

- A. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”
- B. Paul references the OT characters as the fathers of his audience.
1. At first glance, this would appear that the apostle is writing to a primarily Jewish audience; however, Jews in Paul’s day would not dream of entering a pagan temple.
 2. It seems far more likely that Paul references these ancient Israelites as the fathers of faith—whether the believer is Jew or Gentile.
 - a. Paul refers to all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, as children of Abraham: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7).
 - b. Paul does the same thing here with the Israelites in the wilderness.
 - The point is that there is a continuation of the people of God.
 - We are their children, not by flesh and blood, but because we live by the same faith in the same God as did they.
- C. The fathers were under the cloud, passed through the sea, were baptized into Moses, ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink.
1. The cloud stood over the people as protection from the heat of the desert.
 - a. “You, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night” (Num 14:14).
 - b. Thus—and this is quite important for Paul’s purpose; notice that he repeatedly mentions “all” in this passage—all the Israelites had the blessing of being under the cloud.
 2. The Israelites all passed through the sea.
 - a. We recall the context of the passing through the sea:
 - Pharaoh finally agreed to allow the Israelites to go after the plague of the slaying of the firstborn; Pharaoh, however, quickly changed his mind and sent his army after the Israelites.
 - When the Israelites reached the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army hot on their trail, they cried out to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?” (Ex 14:11).
 - God then commanded Moses to lift up his staff, stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it. We then read: “The people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left” (Ex 14:22).
 - When the Egyptians tried to do pass through the sea, the walls of water came crashing in on them.
 - b. God protected every one of his people and allowed them all to pass through the sea.
 3. In being surrounded by the cloud and the sea, the Israelites “were baptized into Moses.”
 - a. The Greek preposition “into” here, when used with baptize, refers to a change of relationship.
 - Notice Gal 3:27: “As many of you as were baptized *into Christ* have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). In the context, Paul details the difference of relationship with Christ before and after our baptism.
 - Before faith came, Jews were imprisoned to the law, and the purpose of that imprisoning was to lead them to Christ (3:23-24).
 - Now that faith is the basis of our relationship with God, we are no longer under the guardian, but we are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (3:25-26).
 - We are sons of God through faith, because we have been baptized *into Christ*, and have thus put on Christ (3:27).
 - Therefore, because of this new relationship with Christ, the former relationships in the world are changed (3:28).
 - Notice what changed it all—that new relationship with Christ we gain by being baptized into him.
 - b. The Israelites’ baptism into Moses changed their relationship with him. The Red Sea and the cloud provided a demarcation line between the loose confederation of slaves they were in Egypt and the people of God under Moses’ direction they were in the wilderness.
 4. They all ate from the same spiritual food and drank from the same spiritual rock.

- a. Paul refers to the manna they received in the wilderness as spiritual food—in the wilderness, the people received manna and quail: Ex 16:13-15.
 - b. Paul likewise references the water they drank as coming from a spiritual rock—in the wilderness, the people received water: e.g., Ex 17:6.
 - c. Notice that Paul refers to both the food and drink as spiritual—i.e., it came from the hand of God.
5. The people all drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.
- a. The second time we see the word drank in v. 4 there is a change of tense in Greek. The tense indicated a continual supply to the spiritual water. We know that the Israelites drank time and time again through the power of God.
 - b. Christ, the spiritual Rock, followed the people.
 - There is an old rabbinic legend which says that a rock miraculously followed the people and provided water whenever they needed it. Some versions of the legend add that it was for Miriam’s benefit that this took place.
 - Paul seems to use this legend to make a point.
 - I don’t believe Paul accepted that legend as fact for one second.
 - In fact, as you go and read the narratives of Moses’ providing water, he provided water from different rocks on different occasions in different places—Not only did Moses not use the same rock, but the rock did not miraculously follow the people.
 - It seems to me that Paul is using this legend as an illustration, quite like I might use a fictional legend (e.g., the tortoise and the hare) to make a point in a sermon.
 - Here’s what Paul is trying to accomplish—he is saying, “The rabbis have a legend that the rock miraculously followed the people and provided water whenever they needed it. Let me tell you who was really following the people, not some rock, but the Lord Jesus in his preincarnate state.” It wasn’t through some rock that the people drank; it was through the power of God.
- D. What’s Paul trying to teach the strong in Corinth?
1. He makes a point that all the Israelites received these same blessings from God.
 - a. It’s not as though Aaron didn’t have these benefits and that’s why he constructed the golden calf; it’s not as though Korah failed to receive some of these blessings and that’s why he led his rebellion; it’s not as though only two spies received these blessings and that’s why ten of the twelve rejected God’s promises.
 - b. Thus, every single Christian receives every single blessing of God.
 - “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3).
 - We cannot look at someone, therefore, who falls away from Christ and say that he or she lacked some of God’s blessings or God’s promises. Just as all the Israelites received God’s promises, we likewise receive all of God’s blessings and promises.
 2. All the Israelites, in this context, received the blessings of God as those blessings related to protection.
 - a. Think of the protection these blessings provided:
 - The cloud provided protection from the scorching heat of the desert; the parting of the Red Sea provided protection from the Egyptian army; and the manna, quail and water provided protection from starvation.
 - In other words, God was in the desert protecting his people.
 - b. Likewise, Paul mentions God’s protection of the strong in Corinth.
 - “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (v. 13).
 - Therefore, the strong in Corinth had protection against the temptation to go to pagan temples and lead their weaker brethren astray.
 - God wouldn’t allow these Christians to be so overcome with temptation that they couldn’t resist it.
 - God would also allow these Christians a way of escape—just like he provided the Israelites when Pharaoh’s army was getting so very close.
 - c. What a blessing it is to know that we have the protection of God!

- When I feel like lashing out at my spouse, God will provide a way so that I don't give in to my flesh.
- When I feel like watching a sexually oriented TV program, God will provide a way so that I don't give in to my flesh.
- Will we look for that spiritual blessing, that divine protection, or will we ignore it and sin against God?

III. SPIRITUAL BANISHMENT, v. 5.

A. "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

B. Notice the "nevertheless" in the ESV and NIV or "but" in the KJV.

1. The word in Greek is a strong "but," and it references a complete change in thought. That's why the newer translation often put "nevertheless" in the text.
2. The best way to explain this idea is probably having an argument with our spouse.
 - a. Guys, maybe your wife comes home and says, "You never do anything but sit and watch football." And you say, "Oh yeah, but what about that time I mowed the lawn last summer."
 - b. See what you did. You didn't disagree with her—you simply changed the subject to something else.
3. That's precisely what Paul is doing here. He states as fact that the Israelites received these protections, and then he changes the subject. They received these blessings, but they still fell.

C. With most of them God was not pleased.

1. If we were giving a Pulitzer Prize in biblical literature for the understatement of the year, Paul would win it with this statement. It wasn't just with most of them God was displeased, for of those who crossed the Red Sea on dry ground only TWO—Joshua & Caleb—were not overthrown in the wilderness. Even Moses himself died in the wilderness because of God's displeasure.
2. What caused God's displeasure in the wilderness?
 - a. They were idolaters.
 - Paul specifically references in the next paragraph the case when Aaron erected the golden calf.
 - Ex 32:5-6.
 - b. They were sexually immoral.
 - Paul specifically references in the next paragraph the case when the people were in Shittim.
 - Num 25:1.

D. Because of God's displeasure, he overthrew them in the wilderness.

1. The Greek term here is a rather strong word—the word means to lay low as if from a hurricane. The picture is of people standing upright & a sudden hurricane comes and just annihilates them.
2. Paul details that annihilation in the next paragraph (vv 8-10).

E. Here's the whole point of this paragraph: Even though the Israelites enjoyed God's protection & blessings, they disobeyed and God judged them.

1. Paul wants to impress on the strong in Corinth that even though they are Christians, even though they enjoy the blessings of God, they can lose that position by causing their weaker brethren to sin.
2. We absolutely must realize that even though we enjoy the blessings of God, we can sin so as to be lost.
 - a. John Calvin, the famed Reformer, taught that people who fell away only seemed to have salvation: "It daily happens that those who seemed to belong to Christ revolt from him and fall away: Nay, in the very passage where he declares that none of those whom the Father has given to him have perished, he excepts the son of perdition. This, indeed, is true; but it is equally true that such persons never adhered to Christ with that heartfelt confidence by which I say that the certainty of our election is established: 'They went out from us,' says John, 'but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us,' (1 John 2:19). I deny not that they have signs of calling similar to those given to the elect; but I do not at all admit that they have that sure confirmation of election which I desire believers to seek from the word of the gospel."
 - b. We could go to a variety of other texts to make the point that Calvin misunderstood the Scriptures.
 - You know those texts quite well yourselves.
 - But, this text makes the point very well. Did the Israelites only seem to have a cloud over them or only seem to pass through the sea or only seem to partake of spiritual food? No, they actually did so, and they still lost their position through sin.
 - c. What about you? Have you known the blessings of God & lost that position because of sin?

- Have you neglected to do what you know was right to the degree that you're no longer right with God?
- Have you engaged in some repeated sin without repentance & lost your position with God?
- Do you need to come this morning & regain that position as we stand and sing?