The city of Constantinople was known as an impregnable fortress. As the capital of the Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire), it was surrounded on three sides by water and had an elaborate system of walls that repelled countless invaders over the centuries.

When Sultan Mehmed II, the 21-year-old ruler of the Ottoman Empire, decided to lay siege to Constantinople in 1453, he brought with him a formidable force that included an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 soldiers. The city was defended by just 7,000 men.

Despite the vast numerical superiority of the Sultan’s army, Constantinople’s defeat was not inevitable. The size and strength of its walls made it known as the best-defended city in Europe.

The Sultan launched several frontal attacks on Constantinople, and he built a fleet of ships and boats to attack the city by sea. All of these attacks were repelled with great loss of life. He also employed a special cannon that could fire a 600-pound stone ball one mile, but the cannon took so long to load and fire that the defenders were able to repair the damage it inflicted to the walls before it could be fired again.

Next, he had his men attempt to tunnel under the walls, but Constantinople’s defenders destroyed the tunnels.

After nearly six weeks of trying to take Constantinople, the Sultan sent a messenger to Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos and told him that if he gave him the city, he would let the emperor and all the city’s inhabitants go in peace with their possessions.

Constantine gave the Sultan a bold reply: “Giving you the city depends neither on me nor on anyone else among its inhabitants, as we have all decided to die with our own free will and we shall not consider our lives.”

Angered at Constantine’s reply, the Sultan launched a massive assault on the city, sending wave after wave of soldiers to attack the city. Constantinople’s defenders stood strong, but then a curious thing happened: Turkish flags were raised above a small gate called Kerkoporta. Seeing that the walls had been breached, the defenders fled their posts and were routed by the Turks.

How did the Turks breach the walls? Someone left the gate open. Historians debate whether the gate was left open by accident or whether Turkish sympathizers opened it. In any case, once the gate was open, the city fell quickly.

Thousands of soldiers and civilians were killed as the Turks plundered the city. Another 30,000 were enslaved or deported. A witness of the siege described blood flowing in the city “like rainwater in the gutters after a sudden storm.”

The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the once mighty Roman Empire, and its downfall was the result of an open gate.

Proverbs 25:28 says, “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.”

This means that a person who lacks self-control is easily attacked and defeated. Or in other words, when he is tempted to sin, he offers little or no resistance to that temptation.

We must remain vigilant because temptation can attack us at any time.

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

As Galatians tells us, we should crucify our sinful nature with its passions and desires. Paul compares the fight to control ourselves to a boxing match: “I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

But we are not alone in our fight. Each of us has God in our corner.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We all have a choice when we are tempted to sin. As the poet Robert Frost once wrote: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

The road less traveled isn’t always easy or pleasant, but it leads to heaven.

“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:5-6).