

Tempting God

A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 3

The concept of tempting / putting to test develops in the Old Testament during the Exodus when the nation of Israel paradoxically tests God to affirm His desire for them. Observing the sequence of events helps one understand the desires of the nation of Israel and the subsequent frustration of God. The concept is developed further during the life and after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

1. When God spoke to Moses, He reveals that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know Him as YHWH, I AM WHO I AM (Ex 3:14), which can be understood as I am He Who exists. To establish His real existence to the nation of Israel, God will free them from bondage and bring them to the land.

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord.'" So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, **but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.** (Ex 6:2-9)

Without any proof, the nation of Israel does not believe Moses that God exists nor place a trust in Moses' account of God's word. What is also not apparent is how defines God's people, which He reveals later (Ex 19:5-6).

2. Despite demonstrating His real existence as the God of Abraham by bringing the nation of Israel out of Egypt "with great judgments," the nation begins to test God as Pharaoh chases them.

As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; **so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord.** Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent." Then the Lord said to Moses, "**Why are you crying out to Me?** Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. (Ex 14:10-15)

As Pharaoh approaches, the nation of Israel cries out to God; their test reflects their desire to know if God is truly real - if you are our God, save us. Despite witnessing God's supernatural judgments of Egypt, the nation of Israel continued to have significant doubts and were willing to continue serving the Egyptians!

3. As the nation continued on their journey to the land, their grumbling and complaining increased (Ex 15:22-25; 16:2-12). Despite the Exodus and His provisions so that "you shall know that I am the Lord your God" (Ex 16:12), the nation of Israel persisted in tempting God to prove Himself. They were not content with the knowledge that the Lord was their God, they wanted the constant reassurance that He was with them albeit as the invisible God; His word was not enough.

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to... (continues next page)

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them, “Why do you quarrel with me? **Why do you test the Lord?**” But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because **they tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?”** (Ex 17:1-7)

4. Despite seeing God with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel failed to wait for Moses’ return as instructed (Ex 24:9-14). Moreover, Aaron failed to resist the nation’s request of him to “make us a god who will go before us.”

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, **make us a god who will go before us**; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. (Ex 32:1-6)

The nation of Israel’s tempting of God reveals the desire of their heart. Rather than serve the living God, they desired a god who would serve them. Placing their faith in a dead object violated God’s commandment (Ex 20:3-5), demonstrated their unfaithfulness (Ex 24:3) and was the basis for their judgment (Ex 32:1-35).

5. During the forty year wander while on their way to the Promised Land, the nation of Israel continued to test and provoke God. In their desire to know if God was really with them, the nation sought constant reassurance of His presence. This period of persistent testing was notable and served as an example in the New Testament of what not to do.

Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me,
As in the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me,
And saw My works for forty years. (Heb 3:8-9)

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, 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 were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, **with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.** Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. **Nor let us try (peirazō) the Lord, as some of them did,** and were destroyed by the serpents. **Nor grumble, as some of them did,** and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Cor 10:1-11)

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For all those who call themselves Christians, genuine faith places a trust in God's word; genuine Believers should not test / tempt God to prove Himself.

6. When Jesus arrive on earth, the Jews continue to test God; however, in tempting Jesus to prove Himself, their motive is to justify murdering His Son. This is the hypocrisy that Jesus exposes.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and **testing Jesus**, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. (Matt 16:1)

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, **testing Him** and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" (Matt 19:3)

But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "**Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?**" (Matt 22:18)

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, **testing Him**, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (Matt 22:34-36)

They were saying this, **testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him**. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:6-7)

Tempting Jesus was testing God, because a) Jesus' name, divinely bestowed, meant "God saves (Matt 1:21-25)," b) Jesus was the image of the invisible God (John 1:14-18; Col 1:15-16), and c) Jesus says and does what His Father commands because His Father abides within Him (John 6:38-40; 8:28-29; 14:7-11).

7. With His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Old Covenant (Matt 5:17-18) and ushered in the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9:15-16). However, by imposing upon Gentile Believers compliance to the Law, Peter accused Jewish Christians of tempting God, because it revealed their desire for the Old Covenant and their view that the New Covenant was insufficient for salvation.

After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore **why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?**" (Acts 15:7-10)

Just before entering the Promised Land, after the 40 years of wandering and testing God, Moses teaches the nation of Israel at Beth Peor not to put God to test:

"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him in Massah." (Deut 6:16)

Jesus would respond to Satan with the same words when He was being tested in the wilderness:

Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" (Matt 4:7 / Luke 4:12)

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Mentioned in the previous article in this series on the practice of sin (Temptation: Part 2 at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/8Sin/PersonalPracticeTemptation.aspx), the Greek intensive verb “peirazō” is significant for its emphasis on the tempter’s effort in tempting / testing and conveys a sense of strong, forceful, and concentrated action. When Jesus speaks of, “you shall not put the Lord God to test,” He modifies the intensive verb “peirazō” with “ekpeirazō” to convey the sense of “to *thoroughly* tempt with focused intent.” Other instances of this Greek verb add a nuance in meaning of these passages.

And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not (**ekpeirazō**) put the Lord your God to the test (**ekpeirazō**).’” (Luke 4:12)

And a lawyer stood up and put (**ekpeirazō**) Him to the test (**ekpeirazō**), saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

Nor let us try (**ekpeirazō**) the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. (1 Cor 10:9)

When human beings tempt God or Jesus Christ to test the desires of Their heart, it is an expression of doubt and disbelief in God’s word that “He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Bible also speaks of testing the Holy Spirit, which completes the idea that testing any of the Trinity is the same as testing them all.

Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test (**peirazō**)? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.” (Acts 5:9)

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is well known; however, there is considerable difficulty in understanding the meaning of putting the Holy Spirit to test.

Peter and John were being persecuted by Jewish religious authorities for converting some five thousand men to Christianity through the miracle of healing the lame beggar (Acts 3:1-10), which validated their testimony of Jesus Christ. Innocent of any crime, they were released and commanded to not speak the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:16-18).

Upon their return to the Jerusalem church, they praised God for His Son and prayed that more miracles will be accomplished through the power and testimony of the name Jesus Christ (Acts 4:23-31). In petitioning that the word of God be spoken with confidence, the bond servants of God were filled with the Holy Spirit, and all of the Believers of the church “were of one heart and soul,” “not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own,” “all things were common property to them,” and “there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:32-34). When Believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, God’s abundant grace (Acts 4:33) elicited a communal response which was also seen in an earlier occasion of the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:43-47).

Ananias and Sapphira did not exhibit such a response, because they were not Believers. They were confronted with their offering by the apostle Peter for allowing Satan to fill their hearts to lie, to “keep back some of the price of the land” so that money would “remain your own” and “under your control” (Acts 5:3-9). Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira “conceived this deed” in their hearts, and their disobedience was akin to Satan filling their hearts; “you have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4).

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The lie that Ananias and Sapphira perpetrated was that they attempted to portray their partial offering as the entire proceeds of the property sale.

When laying their offering at the feet of Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira is seen as lying to the Holy Spirit. In their attempt to deceive men with the value of their donation, they were instead attempting to deceive God; they were testing the omniscience of the Holy Spirit.

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).