

SESSION 3

The Temptation to Test God



QUESTION 1:

When have you realized “looking for a sign” was not such a great idea after all?

THE POINT

We can trust God without putting Him to the test.

THE PASSAGE

Deuteronomy 6:16-25; Matthew 4:5-7

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I was in elementary school when central air conditioning units were finally installed throughout my school. My family had not been in the United States very long, and I couldn't speak English very well. I was new, but I already had a crush on a girl in my class.

For some reason, the idea came into my head to ask God for a sign so I could know if this girl liked me. The sign I chose? Because the AC unit was on a thermostat, it would turn on and off automatically, so I wanted it to come on just at the moment I predicted. I closed my eyes and waited and waited and waited, then I said, "NOW." Nothing happened. Being determined, I tried again. Again, nothing happened.

We can be tempted to do the same as adults and put God to the test. But because God is faithful, we don't need to put Him to the test. We simply need to trust Him and ask Him for what we need.

Matthew 4:5-7

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Key Words: **The holy city (v. 5)**—This is a clear reference to Jerusalem as the mention of the temple indicates. In Luke’s version of this event, the city is specifically called Jerusalem (Luke 4:9).

Pinnacle of the temple (v. 5)—The pinnacle likely refers to the flat-topped corner of Solomon’s porch on the southeast corner of the temple complex.

When we’re afraid, we often long for God’s presence and protection. Satan would like nothing more than to use those fears to undermine our faith in God. This is what Satan attempted with his second temptation directed at Jesus.

With the first temptation, Satan tried in vain to get Jesus to question God’s provision. With this second temptation, Satan was tempting Jesus to question God’s presence and protection. Forty days before this temptation, John the Baptist had baptized Jesus. At that baptism, God the Father spoke audibly and declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Jesus had no reason to doubt the Father and His care for Him, but Satan was going to try.

Jesus responded to the first temptation by quoting Scripture. Now Satan tried using Scripture to his own advantage. Satan knows Scripture well, and he knew Jesus had come to save His

people from their sins and bring them back to God. So Satan quoted from Psalm 91, a psalm about God's protection over His people.

This was not the first time Satan tried to manipulate a word from God. He did the same with Adam and Eve in the garden: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). Satan used God's words, but also distorted them. What Satan did with Adam, Eve, and Jesus, he'll do with us: manipulate and distort Scripture. Satan uses people to twist Scripture and lead God's people astray.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

To combat Satan's temptations, we must know Scripture well.

Satan used Psalm 91:11-12 to challenge Jesus to put God to the test, to make Jesus prove Himself. If Jesus jumped off the top of the temple, which represented God's presence among His people, the Father would miraculously rescue Him in front of all the people gathered there, and they would see clearly that He is the Messiah. If Jesus wanted to be recognized as their Messiah, this was a quick and easy way to make it happen.

QUESTION 2:

When might we be most tempted to test God?

God does protect as promised in Psalm 91, but we don't need to knowingly put ourselves in harm's way or find ways to "force" God to act. Jesus didn't need a test to prove God's faithfulness, nor would He shortcut the path laid out by the Father's will.

Jesus didn't need a sign, and neither do we. When we're unsure or even afraid of a decision before us, we are to pray and trust the

Lord to act as He deems best. But when we ask for a sign, we're essentially saying, "God, prove yourself!" It exposes our unbelief. It communicates that God's Word is not enough, and we need something more.

Jesus responded to this temptation by quoting Scripture. In the next section, we will look closely at the passage Jesus quoted, but Jesus acted on the command in Deuteronomy 6 not to test the Lord. Jesus didn't need to, for He knew that God was with Him. He didn't need to prove that to Himself, and He would follow the Father's will in how He would reveal Himself to others.

QUESTION 3:

How have you seen a misapplication of Scripture lead people astray?

Deuteronomy 6:16-19

16 Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.

17 Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee.

18 And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers.

19 To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.

Key Words: **Massah (v. 16)**—Massah was the location in Exodus 17 where the people quarreled with Moses about the lack of water in the desert. "Massah" means "testing."

Israel had no reason to put God to the test. So, as God prepared the second generation to go into the promised land, He reminded them once again of His promise of provision. God would bring them into “great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not” (Deut. 6:10-11).

God promised all this to their parents, the first generation that left Egypt for God’s promised land, but they put God to the test because they failed to believe. The Lord reminded them of one such moment in their history when they had camped at Rephidim on their way to Mount Sinai (Ex. 17:1-7). Despite all the signs and wonders they witnessed God perform against Egypt (7:14–12:30), despite watching God destroy the Egyptian army (14:26-28), despite the manna God provided (16:1-15), they still complained to Moses that they had no water to drink. They became so distraught, they wondered if God brought them out of slavery in Egypt just to kill them with thirst in the wilderness (Ex. 17:3).

God had already performed miracle after miracle in His care and provision for the Israelites, yet they failed to believe God could provide them with water. How many more signs would they need? What else would God have to do? They expected God to prove Himself one more time by providing water. They put God to the test. They could’ve trusted God to provide water in His own way, say through natural springs and a well, but instead they demanded God do the miraculous.

Are we any different? We should be able to look back over our lives and see God’s faithfulness. Time and time again, the Lord has provided for our needs. He has protected us from harm. He has sustained us during a dark season. And, yet, when we face the next crisis, we’re tempted to put God to the test. We may not say it out loud, but essentially we are saying, “Prove yourself one more time, God!”

The command is simple: Don't test, but instead, trust. Immediately after the command, "Ye shall not tempt," the Israelites were told to diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God . . . do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD." God wants to bless us, as He wanted to bless the Israelites, but we can only experience those blessings as we trust Him and obey His word. No test is necessary when we're living fully in obedience to Him.

QUESTION 4:

How does an obedient faith keep us from testing God?

Deuteronomy 6:20-25

20 And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand:

22 And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes:

23 And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.

24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

25 And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

Not only were the Israelites to be faithful and obedient to God, but they were also to teach their children to do the same. If they wanted their children to experience God's goodness and faithfulness, they must teach them to keep the covenant. They were to teach them

God's Word. This is what Moses had told them earlier: "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:6-7).

But it was not enough for the succeeding generations to know what to do; they needed to know why they were doing it. The "why" motivates the "what." Tradition can be a vital part of the Christian faith. The danger with tradition is when we do things simply because it is tradition, and we've lost the meaning and significance of how it became a tradition. As one generation hands down truths and practices to the next generation, it is important to also hand down the "why" of those truths and practices.

We're used to hearing children ask, "Why?" Parents can often feel exasperated when it seems like that is the only word a preschooler knows! We should take advantage of these opportunities to teach children, especially when it comes to matters of faith. Moses told the Israelites to take advantage of the moment when a child asks, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?" (v. 20).

The why behind their actions was embedded in their history. The Israelites were to pass on the story—their holy history—of how God had worked on their behalf. This succinct statement of their redemptive history is in verses 21-24, and the emphasis is not on them but on God. "The Lord brought us out . . . the Lord shewed signs and wonders . . . he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes."

We're not Israel under the old covenant, but we serve the same God. Their history is a part of our history. The story of redemption was carried out completely in Christ; God established a new covenant through the blood of His Son. One of the glorious promises of the new covenant that Jesus established by His blood is a new heart and God's indwelling Spirit.

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Jesus died for us. He rose again. He forgives. He gives new life. In every step along the way, it is God who took the initiative. How do we respond to this great deliverance? The Israelites were to respond to God’s work for them with obedience and fear, submission and trust. It is the same for us. There is no reason for us to give in to the temptation to test God. When we consider all He has done for us through Jesus Christ, we can trust confidently that He takes care of us and His plans are the best for us. We experience God’s goodness and faithfulness as we obey His Word.

QUESTION 5:

What’s an example of obedience to God’s commands producing goodness in your life?

ENGAGE

Complete the statements below regarding different crisis situations.

Health Crisis

Test: If God wants me to trust Him in this, then He better . . .

Trust: I choose to trust God in this because He . . .

Financial Crisis

Test: If God wants me to trust Him in this, then He better . . .

Trust: I choose to trust God in this because He . . .

Family Crisis

Test: If God wants me to trust Him in this, then He better . . .

Trust: I choose to trust God in this because He . . .

LIVE IT OUT

When you know God and the great salvation He has given you in Christ, you can fully trust Him. How will you let this truth impact your life?

- ▶ **Confess.** If there are areas where you live with uncertainty and are tempted to put God to the test, confess that as wrong. Acknowledge that you do not need to attempt to force God to act the way you want Him to act. Ask God to help you simply trust Him.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Choose a verse or two that emphasizes the value of trusting God and memorize them. Here are two passages to consider: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6); “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3).
- ▶ **Challenge.** If you know someone who is presuming upon God to act in a way that justifies his or her actions, challenge this person to see why Jesus wouldn’t put God to such a test. Encourage this individual to trust God to work in His own perfect way and timing.

