

Temptation or the Testing Time

Part I

"...and lead us not into temptation..."(Matt. 6:13) is a familiar part of the "Lord's Prayer." Does God lead us into temptation? What does that phrase mean? What we do know is that the Hebrew word "massa" and the Greek word "peirasmos" not only mean "temptation" but also have the mean of "testing" or "putting to the proof." The Hebrew word is used to test a variety of things -- a sword (I Sam. 17:39); a reputation (I Kings 10:1; 2 Chron. 9:1); one's conviction or policy (Dan. 1:12,14).

We know that directly tests certain individuals such as Abraham (Gen. 22:1) and Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:31). He also tested Israel (Ex.15:25; Deut. 33:8). But God's purpose is always for a good cause of exposing loyalty and disloyalty, faith and unbelief. The words are plain when talking about God the Scripture says, "...that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut. 8:2 NAS). And "...that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end" (v.16 NAS).

God allows us to be tested by Satan (Job 1:6-22; 2:1-7) or by false prophets (I Kings 22:21-23). Even Jesus tested Phillip (John 6:6). And Jesus Himself was tested over and over in order that the Pharisees might accuse Him (Matt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18,35; John 8:6).

But God does not tempt us or entice us to sin. The Bible makes this plain from James 1:12-13. We are tempted and enticed to sin when we let our own lusts dictate our behavior. We are also enticed when we put ourselves in the vicinity of enticing, tempting desires. An example would be a person addicted to alcohol stopping by a liquor store and walking around in it all by him/herself. When lust conceives it brings forth sin! Satan enticed David to sin (I Chron. 21:1 and compare with 2 Sam. 24:1-25). The Apostle Paul was aware that people in the God's Church could be tempted away from the faith "...for fear that the tempter might have tempted you and our labor would be in vain" (I Thes.3:5 NAS).

Trials come, testing comes. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery (severe) ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (I Pet. 4:12 NAS). But with each test or trial or temptation God will provide the way to escape. God does not test us above our level of growth. The Scripture says, "...and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (tested, tried, proven) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (I Cor. 10:13 NAS).

Temptation -- the Testing Time

"...and lead us not into temptation..."(Matt. 6:13) is a familiar part of the "Lord's Prayer." Does God lead us into temptation? What does that phrase mean? We know does not entice us to do evil (James 1:12-14) but God does test us (examples of Abraham, Hezekiah, Israel). Still we are to pray "deliver us from the evil one"(NAS).

God puts a lot of people to the test. He even put His Son, Jesus Christ to the test. We find that after Jesus was baptized by John where the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, He was immediately "led" or "impelled" into the desert to be "tempted by the devil"(Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-15; Mark 1:12-13). Matthew's gospel calls Satan "the tempter." Luke and Matthew have different orders of the temptation but Matthew's appears to lead up to a crescendo more than Luke's. They both say essentially the same, however.

Jesus resisted the devil's temptation by focusing on Scripture. Though a careful analysis of their quotes reveals that Satan quoted the Scripture more accurately, we find the Jesus applied it correctly. It is the correct application of Scripture that is more important not the specific word quote. The devil attempted to get Jesus to use His power selfishly for His own benefit. Jesus did not. Rather He quoted, "...man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Next Satan said, "If you are the son of God..." He wanted Jesus to cast himself off the side of the temple building on to the ground and the devil quoted Scripture to make his case. But Jesus knew that man should not put God to the test. "You shall not tempt (put to the test) God."

Next the tempter showed Christ all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them and claimed they were delivered in this age to him. Jesus did not dispute that claim. Satan offered them all to Christ "if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus rebuked Satan and once again quoted the Scripture, "Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." The devil then departed from Him. The first man, Adam, tangled with Satan and was deceived into sin. The second Adam, Christ, gained the victory over Satan. He did it by focusing on Scripture. Jesus could see much clearer the consequences of sin and that helps withstand tests.

There is no test that can come upon us that we cannot bear. God won't allow it. And He will provide the way out (I Cor. 10:13). Thank God for that. Meanwhile let us pray, "And lead us not into temptation (or tests), but deliver us from the evil one."