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God's Tests

By David Servant

FOUR This is a Test...

The Bible is full of stories about people whom God tested. Numerous scriptures explicitly state that God tested certain persons, and an abundance of stories plainly reveal examples of the same principle. Any time God instructed someone to do something that required faith or obedience, it could be considered a test from God. For example, when He instructed the new generation of Israelites to silently circle Jericho for six days, their faith and obedience were tested as a result of God's command. Praise God that on that occasion, they passed the test. Their parents no doubt would have failed it.

Let's look at a few examples of people whom the Bible emphatically states God tested. Once you see a few of these examples, you'll notice many other biblical stories about how God tested certain persons.

We've already read about God's testing of Abraham and the nation of Israel. Later we will study David, Joseph, Philip, and Paul, all of whom the Bible straightforwardly declares were tested by God. Our objective, of course, is to help you better understand God's working in your own life.

Hezekiah

Hezekiah, a godly king of Judah, reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. Of him it is written: "He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him" (2 Kings 18:5).

Hezekiah faced a number of difficulties during his reign, but he also witnessed God's power as he trusted Him for deliverance. It was during Hezekiah's reign that Assyria invaded Judah, and an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who were camped around Jerusalem. Later, Hezekiah experienced divine healing from a terminal illness, and he lived fifteen years longer than he would have otherwise. After his dramatic healing, however, we read:

But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:25-26).

Hezekiah became proud but then repented. Keep this in mind as we continue following Hezekiah's story.

When the son of the king of Babylon heard of Hezekiah's amazing healing, he sent some envoys to Jerusalem to bring Hezekiah a present. While the envoys were there, Hezekiah vainly showed them all of his treasures: "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah did not show them" (2 Kings 20:13b).

Shortly thereafter, the prophet Isaiah foretold to Hezekiah that the day would come when all his treasures would be carried away to Babylon. Concerning this incident, the writer of 2 Chronicles adds an interesting footnote:

And even in the matter of the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him alone *only to test him*, that He might know all that was in his heart (2 Chron. 32:31, emphasis added).

Hezekiah obviously wrestled with the temptation to be proud, and God was watching him during this particular incident of the Babylonian envoys. God "left him alone" so that He might know what was in Hezekiah's heart. This is an important fact. *Our actions reveal what is in our hearts.*

As I've previously mentioned, God's primary purpose in testing people is to discover what is in their hearts. In Hezekiah's case, God wanted to know if the king was still proud, so He allowed him the opportunity to show off his treasures to the Babylonian envoys. As the Babylonians were learning about Hezekiah's hidden riches, God was learning about Hezekiah's hidden heart motives. I wonder what God is learning about us when He leaves us alone?

Later Generations of Israelites Tested

During the times of the judges, we discover another biblical example of God's testing of His people. Soon after Gideon died, Israel reverted to idolatry. And God said:

"Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, *in order to test Israel by them*, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, *to test Israel by them....And they were for testing Israel*, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord...(Judg. 2:20-22; 3:1,4, emphasis added).

God permitted several heathen nations to remain within the territory of the Promised Land in order to test Israel. God had commanded Israel not to intermarry with them or serve their idols. In other words, God tested Israel by permitting them to be tempted. How could God know if His people would obey Him concerning His commandment not to serve foreign gods and intermarry with foreign nations unless there were some foreign nations living near Israel?

Did Israel pass their test? The very next verse tells us the answer:

And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods (Judg. 3:5-6).

They miserably failed their test, and as a result, God disciplined them by selling them "into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia" (Judg. 3:8).

We'll explore this theme in greater detail later, but I want you to see now that God may test us at times by allowing us to be tempted.

More Tests

If you began this book thinking that God doesn't test anyone, I hope you are convinced otherwise by now. If not, let me throw in a few more biblical examples.

During the time of Isaiah, God said that He had tested Israel and found her wanting: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have *tested* you in the furnace of affliction" (Is. 48:10, emphasis added). Times of affliction are always times of testing.

Years later, the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah:

"I, the Lord, search the heart, I *test* the mind [inner man], even to give to each man according to His ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer. 17:10, emphasis added).

Here again we learn that God has a purpose behind His tests. Once He sees our actions (or reactions) He then will reward or discipline us accordingly.

Predicting a remnant who would one day serve Him, the Lord said through the prophet Zechariah:

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and *test them as gold is tested*. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is my God'" (Zech. 13:9, emphasis added).

Here again is the theme of testing through affliction. Like gold when it is refined in the fire, so affliction reveals the impurities in us.

David affirmed that God tests everyone in Psalm 11:

The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids *test* the sons of men. *The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked...* (Ps. 11:4-5a, emphasis added).

Anyone who maintains the idea that God doesn't test anyone is going to have to disagree with a number of the Bible's authors. Anyone who is honest with the Bible, however, will have to agree that God tests people. As I mentioned before, we will later look at scriptures that prove God tested Joseph, David, Philip, and Paul. In the appendix, I've included a listing of every scripture that mentions God's testing of people if you'd like to research it for yourself.

Now let's examine a few examples of biblical individuals whom God obviously tested although the Bible doesn't explicitly say so by using the actual word *test*.

Solomon's Test

Solomon's motives were tested when the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what you wish Me to give you" (1 Kin. 3:5). Solomon asked for wisdom to rule Israel wisely, and God was pleased with his request:

"Because you have asked this thing and not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after

you. And I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days” (1 Kin. 3:11-13).

Solomon’s aspiration was not the accumulation of money, living a long life, or receiving the honor due a king, nor was he preoccupied with revenge. He wanted to serve. Jesus said that if we want to be great, we should become servants of all (see Mt. 20:26). Because Solomon had a servant’s heart, God made him great. Only a servant can be trusted to be a godly leader.

The New Testament parallel to Solomon’s story is found in Matthew’s Gospel. There Jesus said, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

What are you living for? The accumulation of more money? Prestige? Popularity? Power? Or are you living to further God’s kingdom upon this earth, and to live in way that is pleasing to Him? You may have never searched your heart to answer those questions honestly, but you can be sure that God already knows the answer, because you’ve been tested.

A Few Others...

If we wanted to we could look at the tests of many other Bible characters—people like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Elijah, Elisha, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on. We would find some who passed their tests and others who failed. Apparently even Jesus Himself was tested:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted by the devil* (Matt. 4:1, emphasis added).

This scripture plainly states that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness that He might be tempted by the devil. God tested Israel in the same manner when He permitted them to be tempted (in Judges 2 and 3). Here again God used Satan’s temptations as a test. Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus could only be fully qualified to be our Savior if He was sinless. How could He possibly be declared sinless unless He had been tempted in every way? Praise God that Jesus passed every test—the only man ever to do so.

Faith Without a Test is Not Faith at All

Actually, there is no such thing as faith without a test. Faith “is the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith means trusting God’s promises in spite of what we see or how we feel or what the circumstances bring. Faith means disregarding the testimony of our physical senses, but rather, holding fast to God’s promise. If you are going to exercise your faith, it will be tested.

Jesus instructed us to “believe we receive *when we pray*,” and if we will, then He promised that we will have our request (see Mark 11:24). For some requests, we must stand in faith for a certain length of time, believing God has answered our prayer before we actually see the answer. It might be one second or it might be one year, but there is always a time when our faith is tested.

The Bible teaches us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). Without tests, however, it is impossible to exercise faith because faith is not needed for that which can be seen.

What takes the highest priority in your life? Is it what you see with your eyes and hear with your ears, or God’s eternal Word? We need to put God’s Word in its rightful place, as our ultimate source of truth. We should judge everything that comes into our minds

with the question, “Does that agree with what God has said?” If it doesn’t, then it’s an imagination we need to “cast down” (see 1 Cor. 10:5, KJV).

If you want to have God’s best in your life, you’ll have to learn to take God at His Word, disregarding the testimony of your senses and circumstances. Your faith will be tested, but when it is, simply rejoice in the midst of trial and continue to stand upon God’s promises, knowing the outcome in advance. The Bible promises, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord” (Jer. 17:7).