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God's Tests

By David Servant

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The God Who Watches

Your Bible is full of examples of people whom God tested. Numerous scriptures explicitly state that God “tested” certain individuals, and there is an abundance of stories that illustrates the same principle. Any time God instructed someone to do something that required faith or obedience, it could be considered a test from Him. For example, when He instructed the new generation of Israelites to silently circle Jericho for six days, their faith and obedience were tested. Praise God that on that occasion, they passed their test. (Their parents no doubt would have failed it.)

We’ve already read about God’s testing of Adam, Abraham and the nation of Israel. In this chapter, we’ll take a look at a few more examples of people whom Scripture explicitly says God tested. Our objective, of course, is to help you better understand God’s tests in your own life. Let’s start with Hezekiah.

Hezekiah’s Great Test

Hezekiah, a godly king of Judah, reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. Of him Scripture records this tribute: “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).

During his long reign, Hezekiah faced his share of challenges, but he also witnessed God’s power, as he trusted Him for deliverance. For example, it was during Hezekiah’s reign that Assyria invaded Judah, and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers surrounded Jerusalem. Hezekiah looked to the Lord, and an angel of the Lord destroyed the Assyrian army overnight. Later, Hezekiah was divinely healed from a terminal illness, and he lived 15 years longer than he would have otherwise. After his dramatic healing, however, Hezekiah temporarily slipped spiritually:

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).

Keep this incident of Hezekiah's temporary pride in mind as we continue following his 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 Hezekiah that the day would come when all his treasures would be carried away to Babylon.

The author of 2 Chronicles adds this 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).

Obviously, Hezekiah was susceptible to the sin of pride, so the Lord watched him as he spent time with the Babylonian envoys, "leaving him alone" so that He might know what was in Hezekiah's heart. This is an important point. *God looks at hearts by observing actions*. Our actions reveal what is in our hearts.

Again we see that God's primary purpose when He tests people is to learn what is in their hearts. In Hezekiah's case, God wanted to know if he was still proud, so He simply watched him. And as the Babylonians were learning about Hezekiah's riches, God was learning about Hezekiah's hidden heart motives. I wonder what God is learning about us when He leaves us alone? God's desire to know what is in our hearts explains why He sometimes doesn't warn us of imminent painful and self-inflicted troubles! I confess that God has "left me alone" more than a few times.

Later Generations of Israelites Tested

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

The Lord permitted several heathen nations to remain within the territory of the Promised Land in order to test the people of Israel. He had commanded them not to intermarry with those nations or serve their idols. So God tested them by permitting them to be tempted. But don't get upset with God! Unless there were some foreigners living nearby, how could He know if His people would obey Him to not serve foreign gods and intermarry with foreign nations?

Did the Israelites pass this test? You can probably predict 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).

Because they miserably failed their test, God disciplined the Israelites by selling them “into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia” (Judg. 3:8). Disobedience generally doesn’t attract God’s blessing.

We’ll explore this theme in greater detail in later chapters, but I want you to see that God may test us by allowing us to be tempted (which gives us something to ponder when we recall that Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation”).

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 add a few more biblical examples that will surely convince you.

During the time of Isaiah the prophet, 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, even to give to each man according to His ways, according to the fruit of his deeds” (Jer. 17:10, emphasis added).

Once God sees our actions (or reactions) He then rewards, disciplines, or punishes accordingly. Notice God indicated through Jeremiah that He does that with *everyone*. God is a testing God.

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 and silver are refined in the fire, so affliction reveals the impurities in us. I once heard someone say that the silversmith knows that his silver has been sufficiently refined when he can see his reflection in it. What a good analogy of our refining!

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 is honest with the Bible will have to agree that God tests everyone. And we still have much more to read in Scripture about God's testing Joseph, David, Philip, and Paul. (In the appendix, I've listed every scripture that mentions God's testing of people.)

Now let's consider a couple of 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 Matt. 20:26). Because Solomon had a servant's heart, God made him great. Only a servant can be trusted to be a godly leader.

A New Testament counterpart 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 please 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. 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).

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness specifically that He might be tempted by the devil. As we've already learned, 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 person 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 our circumstances seem like. Faith means disregarding the testimony of our senses and holding fast to God’s promises. 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, He promised that we will have our request (see Mark 11:24). But answers to prayers aren’t always instant, are they? We must often stand in faith for a length of time, believing God has answered our prayer before we actually see the answer. There is always a time when our faith is tested.

“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? God’s Word should be 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 2 Cor. 10:5, KJV).

The Bible promises, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord” (Jer. 17:7). If you don’t believe that, don’t expect to be blessed!