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## God's Tests

By David Servant

### **PART THREE** **Tried and Found True**

### **THIRTEEN** **S.I.T.s, M.I.T.s, and D.I.T.s**

If you've been a follower of Jesus for very long, you've no doubt discovered that becoming a Christian didn't end all of your problems. In fact, you may have found yourself facing even more difficulties. The fact is, troubles and trials are in your past, present *and* future, at least until heaven.

So why, exactly, do difficulties periodically (or frequently) assail us? There isn't just one answer to that question.

There are always, of course, those narrow-minded individuals like Job's friends who are willing to set us straight, and who claim that all suffering stems from God's judgment upon individual sin. That kind of uncharitable opinion, however, doesn't pan out in Scripture. Yes, some suffering comes as a result of God's judgment upon sin, but not all of it—as in Job's case for example.

Some suffering (like Job's) comes *not* as a result of *disobedience*, but as a result of *obedience*. This is certainly true of believers who are persecuted for their faith. Satan is obviously the driving force behind those evil people who persecute, torture, and kill Christians. But why does God allow it?

There are some folks, as I've mentioned previously, who say that God can't do anything because Satan possesses Adam's lease and is the god of this world, and so on. Hopefully, by now, you've seen enough scriptures to disprove that theory. If God supposedly can't stop the persecution of Christians, then why has He done it on numerous occasions? Why did God allow Stephen and James to be martyred, yet supernaturally release Peter from jail on the eve of his execution?

The Bible is full of stories of God's timely deliverances. How about the incident recorded in the fifth chapter of Acts when all the apostles were thrown in jail and released by an angel? How about the occasion when Paul and Silas were incarcerated and supernaturally

released by a God-sent earthquake (see Acts 16:25-27)? And how about the deliverance of the three Hebrew young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace, or the rescue of Daniel from the lion's den, or the time when the whole Jewish nation was saved from annihilation through Esther's intercession? Jesus Himself was supernaturally delivered from a premature death on several occasions.

So why does God sometimes deliver His own people from persecution and other times not? Why did He allow as many as six million Christians to die for their faith during just the first three centuries of the church's history? No one but God really knows the answer. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). God is keeping some secrets.

### Three Kinds of Trials

Suffering may stem from God's judgment upon sin. Or, it may stem from Satan's (God-allowed) assaults upon righteousness. But are there any other reasons for our suffering? Yes, sometimes we suffer because we bring it upon ourselves. Many of our problems are self-inflicted, and we have no one to blame but ourselves. When we eat too much pizza and get sick, we can hardly look for some sinister plot of Satan or some divine purpose from God!

Every difficulty is unique and must be analyzed individually. There are at least three major reasons why difficulties assail us. I've categorized them as S.I.T.s, M.I.T.s, and D.I.T.s (pronounced *sitz*, *mitz* and *ditz*).

S.I.T. stands for Self-Inflicted Trial.

M.I.T. stands for Maturing/Testing Intended Trial.

D.I.T. stands for Disciplinary Intended Trial.

Let me expand upon all three.

S.I.T.s. (Self-Inflicted Trials) are the trials we bring upon ourselves because of our own foolishness. I've had my share of them. They serve no real divine purpose except that God allows us to make mistakes in order for us to learn and grow. If God rescued us from every foolish move we made, we'd grow no wiser. Many parents, who have never permitted their children to suffer the consequences of foolish actions, have learned this truth the hard way. Their children enter into adulthood unprepared, having been bailed out of difficult situations all their childhood lives.

We all know what it is like to go through a S.I.T. The one consolation is that the more S.I.T.s you *have* gone through the less S.I.T.s you *will* go through (if you learn from the first ones, that is). As it has been said, "Good judgment is often the product of previous poor judgments." We could avoid every S.I.T. if we'd always listen to God and follow His wisdom.

M.I.T.s (Maturing/Testing Intended Trials) are those difficulties that God permits to come our way in order to test us or help us to mature spiritually. We've already considered a number of scriptural examples of M.I.T.s in this book. You will no doubt remember some of the difficulties the Israelites encountered when wandering in the desert. God's leading them to the bitter waters, for example, would be classified as a M.I.T. Scripture plainly says that God tested them there (Ex. 15:25).

The incident of the disciples facing a fierce gale as they crossed the Sea of Galilee is another example of a M.I.T. God gave them an opportunity to exercise their faith. In later chapters, we'll examine some M.I.T.s in the lives of well-known Bible characters.

D.I.T.s (Disciplinary Intended Trials) are those difficulties God permits to come our way because we are in disobedience to His will. Through them, God is trying to seize our attention in order to bring us to repentance. There are scores of examples of D.I.T.s in Scripture.

If you are facing a trial, how can you know if it is a S.I.T., M.I.T., or D.I.T.?

S.I.T.s should always be easy to identify. A S.I.T. occurs when you have done something foolish and find yourself suffering the consequences. What should you do? Repent for being foolish, and then ask the Lord to help you out of the mess you've made as quickly as possible. Trust Him until you experience your deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe your trial cannot be labeled a S.I.T. So either it's a M.I.T. or D.I.T. The difference between the two is that D.I.T.s are the result of discipline upon sin whereas M.I.T.s are not. We can (and will) experience M.I.T.s even when we are completely obedient to God, such as in Job's case.

If you find yourself in the midst of a D.I.T., then repent and trust God for deliverance. If you find yourself facing a M.I.T., then you don't need to repent. Just find one of God's promises that applies to your particular difficulty and trust Him for help or your deliverance, which He will be faithful to perform as you persevere in faith.

### A King's Trials

Let's take a look at the life of a man who once faced two M.I.T.s and then a D.I.T. His name was Asa, better known as King Asa, a former ruler over the nation of Judah.

Asa became king after the death of his father, Abijah, and the Bible record tells us that there was peace during the first ten years of his good rule—something that Judah had not experienced during the corrupt reign of Asa's father:

The land was undisturbed for ten years during his [Asa's] days. And Asa did good and right in the sight of the Lord his God, and he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherim [female idols], and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah. And the kingdom was undisturbed under him. And he built fortified cities in Judah, since the land was undisturbed, and there was no one at war with him during those years, *because the Lord had given him rest*. For he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and *He has given us rest on every side*." So they built and prospered (2 Chron. 14:1-7, emphasis added).

Notice that twice in the above passage, *God* was the One who was credited for Judah's peace. He granted the nation peace because of the people's obedience to His Law. Under God's blessing, Judah peacefully prospered for ten wonderful years.

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<sup>1</sup> There is an element of M.I.T.s and D.I.T.s in every S.I.T. In God's sovereign permissive will, we do grow and mature from suffering a S.I.T., which makes every S.I.T. somewhat like a M.I.T. During a S.I.T., the suffering we endure as a consequence of our foolishness has a disciplining effect on our lives, and is therefore somewhat like a D.I.T.

That peace was abruptly shattered, however, during the eleventh year of Asa's good reign. Zerah the Ethiopian, along with an army of one million men equipped with three hundred chariots, invaded Judah's territory. Rising to meet the challenge, Asa, with his army of 580,000, went out to meet him.

Judah was outnumbered almost two to one and faced an army that was technologically superior for its day. Imagine the tactical advantage that a man in a chariot has over a man who stands on his feet. The Ethiopians had *three hundred* chariots. Without a miracle, Judah was about to lose half a million soldiers and be annexed by Ethiopia.

### **Believing Brings Blessings**

Before the men of Judah went out to battle the Ethiopians, Asa prayed:

Lord, there is no one besides Thee to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we *trust* in Thee, and in Thy name we have come against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee (2 Chron. 14:11, emphasis added).

God answered Asa's prayers:

The Lord routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled....and so many of the Ethiopians fell that they could not recover, for they were shattered before the Lord, and before His army. And they [the soldiers of Judah] carried away very much plunder. And they destroyed all the cities around Gerar, for the dread of the Lord had fallen on them; and they despoiled all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. They also struck down those who owned livestock, and they carried away large numbers of sheep and camels (2 Chron. 14:12-15).

Now let's look at this story from God's perspective. He obviously wasn't trying to motivate the people of Judah to repent by means of a trial, so this particular trial wasn't a D.I.T. In addition, the people of Judah had made no foolish mistakes that triggered an Ethiopian invasion, so this trial wasn't a S.I.T. This trial, then, was a M.I.T.

Think about this: God could have stopped the Ethiopians even before they got out of Ethiopia, and He could have done it in a thousand ways. So why didn't He? Because by allowing Ethiopia to invade Judah, an opportunity was provided for the people of Judah to exercise their faith in the Lord. They did, and they were greatly blessed in the end as a result. Without faith it is impossible to please God, but, generally speaking, without trials it is impossible to demonstrate faith.

Again, note that twice in 2 Chronicles 14:6-7 the affirmation is made that *God* is the one who gave Judah rest from war for the first ten years of Asa's reign. If God gave Judah rest from war for the first ten years, why didn't He give Judah rest in the eleventh year? It could only be because God wanted to bless His people for their obedience. And interestingly enough, *God's blessing came in the form of an Ethiopian invasion*. The people of Judah were much

wealthier after their trial. In their case the proverb is true: “The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous” (Prov. 13:22).<sup>2</sup>

It is probably safe to assume that God also used the Ethiopian invasion of Judah as a means of judgment upon Ethiopia. Judah’s M.I.T. was Ethiopia’s D.I.T.

### **Consider it All Joy**

Too often, when we face troubles, we search in vain for some sin we’ve committed so we can repent and find deliverance. Trials occur, however, when we are obeying God as well as when we are disobeying God. If we face a M.I.T. when we think we are suffering a D.I.T., we may miss out on a blessing from God, not seeing His sovereign hand of love.

So you lost your job? Rejoice! That means that God must have a better job for you! So you’ve been laid flat with sickness? Praise God! Think of how many people with whom you can share the testimony of your healing! Others might have their faith encouraged by your testimony and be healed themselves.

Actually, M.I.T.s could also be classified as B.I.T.s, meaning “Blessing Intended Trials.” That is why we should “consider it all joy” (Jas. 1:2) when trials come our way because they are really opportunities for blessings. Beware, however: When we complain or fail to trust God in a M.I.T.—as we will soon learn from Asa’s story—we may miss out on the blessings God intends for us to enjoy.

### **Back to Asa**

After his first great victory over the Ethiopians, and through the encouragement of Azariah the prophet, Asa instituted even more far-reaching reforms in his nation during the next five years of his reign:

Now when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the Lord which was in front of the porch of the Lord. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign. And they sacrificed to the Lord that day 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought. [The Lord was the Lord of their possessions.] And they entered into the covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and soul; and whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. Moreover, they made an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets, and with horns. [When people get serious about serving God, their worship tends to become more enthusiastic.] And all Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So the Lord gave them rest on every side (2 Chron. 15:8-15).

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<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind, however, that truly righteous people aren’t greedy, and thus they share their abundance with those who are less fortunate.

Asa's sincere dedication to the Lord was further revealed when he removed his own grandmother from her position as "queen mother" because she had "made a horrid image of an Asherah." The Bible informs us that Asa "cut down her horrid image, crushed it and burned it at the brook Kidron" (2 Chron. 15:16). True disciples love their God more than their own relatives.

The final words of this chapter detailing Asa's reforms are, "And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (2 Chron. 15:19). So Judah enjoyed at least 24 years of peace after the Ethiopian invasion.

### Asa's Second Trial

Notice again that *the Lord* was given the credit for this period of peace in verse 15, but as verse 19 intimates, another M.I.T. was on the horizon.

This time, Baasha, king of Israel, prepared to invade Judah. (The kingdom of Israel had been divided years earlier into "Judah" and "Israel.") This time, however, Asa did not trust the Lord as he had years before. Instead, he used the silver and gold from the "treasuries of the house of the Lord and the king's house" to pay Ben-hadad, king of neighboring Syria, to break his covenant with Israel and attack. Ben-hadad obliged, and as a result, Israel ceased its preparations to invade Judah. That is not the end of the story, however, because God was not pleased:

At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have *not relied on the Lord your God*, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped your hand" (2 Chron. 16:7, emphasis added).

In other words, God would have defeated both Israel *and* Syria if Asa had trusted God, but Asa actually paid Syria to deliver his nation from Israel. God was going to cause something bad to work together for good for His people. His intention was that they would trust Him and be blessed, just as they had been blessed during the Ethiopian invasion 25 years earlier.

Now think about that. The only reason God permits M.I.T.s to come our way is that we might ultimately be blessed. That is why we should "give thanks in everything" and "rejoice always" (1 Thes. 5:16,18). To those who believe, M.I.T.s are doors to blessings from God.

Let's read further what God said to Asa:

Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied upon the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the whole earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars (2 Chron. 16:8-9).

I don't know if those future wars would come as S.I.T.s or M.I.T.s (or possibly even D.I.T.s.). They may have come as S.I.T.s because the nations surrounding Judah would now have the courage to attack—courage that they never would have gained if Asa had trusted God for a great deliverance. Or, those future invasions may have come as M.I.T.s because, as I have stated previously, if you fail one of God's tests, you often get to take the test over.

## Asa's Final Trial

Did Asa repent at God's rebuke? No, tragically he did the equivalent of someone who beats the newspaper boy because he doesn't like the headlines. Asa had Hanani the prophet thrown in prison, and "Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time" (2 Chron. 16:10). It's clear that Asa fell into a backslidden condition.

Of course, Asa's sin didn't go unnoticed by the Lord. Still, He mercifully gave Asa three years to repent. Asa did not repent during those three years, and so Scripture says that in the thirty-ninth year of his reign he "became diseased in his feet" (2 Chron. 16:12). Now *that* trial was a D.I.T. God permitted Asa to be afflicted in hopes of bringing him to repentance.

Sadly, Asa still refused to repent. The Bible tells us that Asa's "disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord but the physicians. So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign" (2 Chron. 16:12-13).

The implication is clear: If Asa had repented at some point during his two years of misery, God would have healed him. Asa's affliction, however, didn't soften him. Rather, it hardened him, and he died before he should have.<sup>3</sup>

## The Lesson

In review, Asa experienced at least three major trials in his life: two M.I.T.s and one D.I.T. He blew it during the second M.I.T. and got mad at God, which resulted in his D.I.T.

We must not forget that even D.I.T.s are manifestations of God's love for us. Jesus said: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

I am a father of three children, and I love them very much. When they were younger, I disciplined them, and I did it because I loved them. I wanted them to learn to obey God so that they could enjoy His blessings.

God loves us as a Father. If you find yourself suffering in the midst of a trial, I encourage you to seek your Father to find out if you are in the midst of a Self-Inflicted Trial, Maturing/Testing Intended Trial, or Disciplinary-Intended Trial. If you need to repent and ask the Lord's forgiveness, then do it, and trust God for deliverance. If you don't need to repent of anything, then just start rejoicing. Believe that all things work together for good as a lover of God, and that blessings are on their way! God delights in our faith, and "He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

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<sup>3</sup> This might give us a clue as to why Satan would "cooperate" with God when God permits him to afflict one of His own in order to bring about his repentance. Satan cooperates because he is hoping that person *won't* repent—which is always a possibility. May I also add that this scripture does not teach us that it is wrong to go to a doctor for medical treatment. It does teach us, however, that if we are sick or diseased because of sin, we'd better repent if we want to get better. When that is the case, doctors can't help.