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God's Tests

By David Servant

Introduction

“If God loves me, why am I facing these difficulties?”

“What did I do to deserve this? Am I being chastened by God or attacked by the devil?”

“Is God trying to teach me something in all this?”

Sound familiar? If you've ever found yourself asking those kinds of questions, then this is a book that will help you. I wrote it with you in mind.

Following Jesus does not guarantee an easy journey. Sometimes the valleys can be deep. There are mountains to scale and rivers to ford. Roadblocks test our faith, and God has not promised us a life void of trials. We've all been tested, and you are certainly not the first person to question God. People have been asking, “Why me Lord?” for a long, long, time.

Some of those inquisitive people are prominent Bible characters whom Scripture says, without apology, God tested. In fact, the Bible mentions that God tested people in over thirty-five different passages. Although those people are all dead and gone, the God who tested them is still alive and well, and He doesn't change. (When you're perfect, there isn't any need to change.) God is still testing people today, and none of us are exempt.

So, together, we are going to study what *the Bible* says about God's tests. I emphasize *the Bible* because there are a myriad of manmade philosophies that attempt to explain life's trials. I am convinced, however, that the safest guide to life on this planet is given by the One who created life on this planet. As we study His Word, I trust you will find some satisfying, biblical answers to your questions.

I must confess, however, that I don't have all the answers. Only God knows everything, and it is obvious that He has chosen to keep some secrets (see Deut. 29:29). I can only tell you what the Bible reveals, and then I'll have to stop. But please don't stop reading just because of my small disclaimer. The Bible provides extensive insight concerning God's tests, and the truth will “make you free” (John 8:32), just as Jesus promised.

In the pages that follow, I present a number of biblical concepts that might challenge the well-entrenched beliefs of some of my readers. I am aware that those members of the body of Christ who presently don't believe that God tests anyone, and those who hold a different position concerning God's sovereignty, will no doubt be disturbed by portions of what I've written.

I want them to understand that I write as one who formerly believed as they do now (at least to some degree). I haven't arrived at the conclusions in this book overnight but, rather, have wrestled for a number of years with the many scriptures that contradicted my original

theology. Finally, I had to raise my flag of surrender and confess, “If I’m going to claim to be a Bible-believer, then I’d better accept exactly what the Bible says—not what some preachers are saying the Bible says.” I hope you will have the courage to do likewise.

If you don’t presently believe that God tests us, my prayer is that God will give you the grace to read this book with an open mind. Read slowly and carefully. Consider the scriptures that I cite because I’ve made a strong case, using more than three hundred scripture references within the text. It is only when we are open to change that our thinking can be changed.

Don’t think for a moment that I’m going to rob you of your faith or fill you with unbelief; on the contrary, your faith in God will be strengthened immensely.

My prayer is that God will change your life as you read. May you better understand God’s work in your life, remembering that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). May you be better prepared to stand before Christ’s judgment seat on that day when each one of us shall give an account of ourselves, and hopefully hear the words that will be spoken to every true disciple: “Well done good and faithful servant!”

David S. Servant

Part 1

All About Tests

Primeval Tests

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much (Jesus, Luke 16:10).

I once heard a story of a wise, elderly man who owned a dry-cleaning business. Periodically, he would hire young men to help him run his shop.

The first day on the job, every new employee was instructed by the shop owner to carefully check the pockets of each bundle of dirty clothing. Unknown to that new employee, the owner secretly placed a quarter in the pocket of one pair of trousers that he was to check.

If the new employee, upon discovering the quarter, brought it to his employer so that it would be returned to its rightful owner, he was hired permanently. If the trainee pocketed the quarter, at the end of the day he was asked not to return, and for good reason: The owner knew that the man who can't be trusted with small things is not going to prove himself trustworthy with larger things. If an employee would steal a customer's quarter, he certainly couldn't be trusted to operate the cash register when the owner was absent.

This is the very first principle we must grasp if we are to understand anything about God's tests: *Trust must be earned.*

God is every bit as wise as the elderly man who owned that dry-cleaning business. He, too, only promotes those whom He can trust. For that reason, just like the dry-cleaning owner, God will test us to see if we can be trusted.

The Original Test

Who was the first person God tested? The first person to be tested was the first person, Adam. Because he was created with a free will, Adam had to be tested---to see if he would obey or disobey. And for that same reason, all of us must be tested.

God did not create us as robots but, rather---as theologians like to say---as "free moral agents." We are not programmed to obey or disobey. We are given a choice.

The reason is obvious. If God had created us as robots, we would possess no capacity to love Him. If you want to know how God would have felt with a race of robots, just place a puppet on your hand and have that puppet tell you that he loves you. Is your heart warmed? I suspect not!

God created people with free wills because His ultimate intention was to have a family that would love Him. If people are not given a choice in the matter, then love for God would be an impossibility. *Robots can't love.*

For that reason, all free moral agents must be tested to see if they will love or hate God---as revealed by their obedience or disobedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). That is simple to understand.

Why the Tree?

Let's return to Adam, the first person to be tested. People sometimes ask the question, "If God didn't want Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, why did He place that tree in the garden of Eden?"

That's a good question, and here's the answer: Although God did not want Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, He did want to see *if* Adam would eat from a tree that He had designated as forbidden. If Adam had been placed in an environment where nothing was forbidden, then it would have been the same as if God had created Adam as a robot without free choice. Adam would have been a robot by virtue of his environment. So the forbidden tree was a test. By it, God would know the answer to the question, "Will this free moral agent obey Me or disobey Me?"

Let us not forget that it was not *Satan* who placed the tree of knowledge in the garden---it was God Himself. Obviously, God didn't have to place it there, but He did. And no one can accuse Him of *tempting* Adam, because He placed every other tree in the garden that was "pleasing to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:9). Adam could never justifiably say to God, "It's your fault that I ate the forbidden fruit because there was nothing else for me to eat." Nor could he claim, "It's your fault that I ate of that tree because all the other fruit looked unappetizing to me!"

So the tree of knowledge was a test, but not a temptation, from God. There is a vast difference between tempting and testing. *God never tempts anyone, but He tests everyone.* If you don't believe me, keep reading. In the next few chapters, we're going to cover a lot of scriptures that prove, beyond any doubt, that God tests everyone.

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

Some think the tree of knowledge was purely symbolic, representing something else (such as sex, for example). The Bible, however, tells us it was a literal tree with literal fruit. The fruit looked good and tasted good, just like every other tree in the garden. The forbidden fruit contained no magical or special power. The only difference between the forbidden fruit and all the other fruits was that it was forbidden.

Why then was it called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"? Probably because Adam had no knowledge of good or evil until he sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. Prior to his fall, all he had ever experienced was good. Adam knew nothing of evil or sorrow. Having no knowledge of evil, he consequently had no knowledge of good either. If you never experienced being wet, for example, you would have no knowledge of being wet or being dry.

After Adam sinned, he then possessed the knowledge of good and evil because both became a part of his daily experience. He could then look back and say, "I really had it *good* before I was expelled from the garden." Or, "God was very *good* to cover us with these animal skins." Or, "The devil certainly was *evil* to tempt us to disobey God." You and I can hardly imagine what it would be like not to have such knowledge.

The main thing we need to understand is that, clearly, God tested Adam, and Adam failed his test. The Bible tells us that God tested many others, and we will study their lives in later chapters. As we do, it will help us recognize God's testings in our own lives, and that will make a difference in how we live.

Abraham's Test

Now it came about after these things, that God *tested* Abraham....And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you" (Gen. 22:1-2, emphasis added).

That God tested Abraham is indisputable. Some who read the *King James Version* have been disturbed by this particular passage because it states that God *tempted* Abraham. We know, of course, that God tempts no one according to James 1:13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one." Thankfully, the *New King James Version* has corrected this error in Genesis 22 and translates it *tested* rather than *tempted*.

Exactly how did God test Abraham? He instructed Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, a very difficult thing to do. God wanted to know, "Does this man fear Me? Does this man love Me more than he loves his own son for whom he waited so long?" Again, this cannot be disputed, because after Abraham passed his test God Himself said, "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12). It's obvious that God's purpose was to test Abraham's devotion and love for Him.

God is also quite interested in knowing how much all of us love Him. Jesus said, for example, that we can't be one of His disciples unless our love for our loved ones seems like hate in comparison to our love for God (see Luke 14:26). God desires and deserves our hearts' devotion.

I'm sure, of course, that God will never ask us to kill any of our children. He, in fact, never intended that Abraham would kill Isaac, but stopped him once it became clear that Abraham was willing to do so. We are, however, sometimes faced with a test of having to decide whom we love the most--God or our loved ones.

A pastor once told me about a young girl in his church who had been recently born again and whose atheistic father forbade her to go to "that fanatical church." She continued to faithfully attend, however, and finally her father delivered an ultimatum: "If you want to follow Jesus, then you will have to move out of our house---and I will no longer consider you my daughter."

She thought about it for a while, and then said: "Daddy, I love you with all my heart, but

I love Jesus more because He died for me. If I must sacrifice living with my earthly father because of serving my Heavenly Father, then I will leave."

Her father was so astonished by her strong convictions that he told her she could stay, and out of curiosity he attended her church the next Sunday---where he was gloriously born again. Praise God that young girl didn't back down from following Jesus. She passed a difficult test and in the process received another new father.

The Test of Our Love and Obedience

God told Abraham to do something that must have been very difficult, and our tests may also seem severe. Of course, any commandment from God brings a test with it. Will we obey or disobey?

For example, Jesus told us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to do good to those who spitefully use us. How many of us are passing that test?

When people mistreat us, it is a test. God, of course, doesn't inspire or motivate people to wrong us, but no one can argue that He certainly allows them to mistreat us at times. Those are the times when our love and obedience are tested, and when we have an opportunity to grow spiritually.

God's desire for all of us is that we become like Jesus---whose most outstanding attribute was and is His unselfish love. From the cross, He even prayed for the soldiers who were dividing His garments. How are we ever going to grow more perfect in love unless we encounter people who are difficult to love? It's easy to love those who love you, but Jesus said even the heathen do that. The true test of our love is when people mistreat us.

When people wrong us, we should view it as a time to grow spiritually---to exercise the love we claim to have. We should view those unfeeling people as blessings in disguise to help us grow. They give us a chance to be like Jesus.

Back to Abraham

Unlike Adam, Abraham passed his test. Once he did, God said to him:

"By Myself I have sworn," declares the Lord, "*because you have done this thing*, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens....And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:16-18, emphasis added).

Once Abraham passed his test, it resulted in God greatly blessing him and also promising to make him a blessing to others. As we will learn in future chapters, the same thing happens when we pass God's tests---we are blessed, and God can make us a greater blessing to others. Once we have proven ourselves trustworthy, then we can be promoted.

Are you passing your tests? If you think you still have room to grow, keep reading. This book was written for you!

For the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 13:3, emphasis added).