

Jesus Second Temptation: Putting God to the test

THIS DOG WAS SO FAITHFUL that the woman could leave her baby with it and go out to attend other matters.

-She always returned to find the child soundly asleep with the dog faithfully watching over him.

One day something tragic happened.

The woman as usual, left the baby in the "hands" of this faithful dog and went out shopping. When she returned, she discovered rather a nasty scene, there was a total mess. The baby's cot was dismantled; his nappies and clothes torn to shreds with bloodstains all over the bedroom where she left the child and the dog. Shocked, the woman wailed as she began looking for the baby. Presently, she saw the faithful dog emerging from under the bed. It was covered with blood and licking its mouth as it had just finished a delicious meal. The woman went berserk and assumed that the dog had devoured her baby. Without much thought she clubbed the dog to death.

But as she continued searching for the "remains" of her child, she beheld another scene. Close to the bed was the baby who, although lying on the bare floor, was safe. And under the bed the carcass of a jackal torn to pieces in what must have been a fierce battle between it and the dog which was now dead. Then reality hit the woman who now began to understand what took place in her absence. The dog fought to protect the baby from the ravenous jackal. It was too late for her now to make amends because in her impatience and anger, she had killed the faithful dog. A dog deserving praise and adoration, that fought to save the life of her dear beloved child received death in return

-How often have we misjudged people and torn them to shreds with harsh words and deeds before we have had time to evaluate the situation?

How often we have misjudged God and his ways and taken things into our hands only to create a further mess.

- It is called SIN OF PRESUMPTION

- Presuming things our way without taking the trouble to find out exactly what the situation really is. Presuming that you know better than God about your situation. A little patience can drastically save us from making the wrong decisions.

- It is putting God to the test and Jesus said "You shall not put God to the test"!

The readings today are about testing and the danger of putting God to the test.

THE TEMPTATION TO JUMP from the temple is the second temptation according to Matthew but the third temptation according to Luke.

For a Jewish audience, In Matthew's case, they might instinctively understand that the temptation to 'throw himself down' or to become like a powerful Lord of the earth, are both increasing degrees of the same temptation to obtain a Messianic dream the easy way. That is to prove or force his kingdom without suffering or being rejected by his people.

To a Gentile, Luke's audience, this order of increasing temptation might go right over their heads. Without digressing and explanation the whole context, possibly Luke was satisfied in getting a less 'deep' understanding of the temptation that might be more applicable to a Gentile audience and their temptations.

THE FIRST THE TEMPTATION is just to satisfy hunger, without any direct religious significance in the desire. The Second is then to a Gentile application, to satisfy a desire for raw power (neglecting the Messianic motive to have that power and fulfil the Jewish expectation of the Messiah's rule according the flesh). Finally, to satisfy a desire for renown recognition and fame,

which seems the ultimate dream of stardom like the gods of Greece and Rome we find the grand temptation (again avoiding the complexity of the Messianic nuances of the chronological order).

Maybe Luke switched the order of these temptations so as to better connect and apply more aptly the gist of the narrative to a heathen audience entirely ignorant of the Messianic nuances that the chronological order introduces. If he used a chronological order he may have had to embark on some digression and side notes of explanation cluttering his evangelical intentions.

SATAN WAS SEEKING to persuade the Lord Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. But why? The answer to this question is not as obvious. I believe that there are several possible reasons, one or more of which may have been Satan's purpose in this temptation:

(1) Satan was seeking to disqualify our Lord as Messiah. Had our Lord "put God to the test," He would have sinned, thereby disqualifying Him to serve as Messiah.

(2) Satan was seeking to get our Lord to doubt the goodness and power of God, and thus to "Divide and Conquer." The only reason for putting God to the test is doubt and unbelief. For Jesus to have jumped would have meant that He doubted God and thus found it necessary to test God's love and care. Our Lord's responses to the first two temptations indicated a firm faith in God, a faith which was willing to passively wait for God to bring about His will, rather than to independently bring it about by His own actions. Satan sought to turn passive faith into presumptive faith, a faith which forced God to act.

(3) Satan may have sought to bring about a premature introduction of Jesus as Messiah, ushering in the kingdom before He could destroy the evil one. Satan may well have learned that the Jews expected Messiah to manifest Himself by leaping from the temple. To persuade Him to prematurely manifest Himself, with divine power and deliverance, might have convinced the people of Jerusalem that He was Messiah, immediately ushering in the kingdom, and hopefully (from Satan's point of view) eliminating the need to crush the head of Satan.

(4) Satan was seeking to kill the Messiah. In Genesis chapter 3, God had told Satan that the Messiah (the seed of the woman) would crush his head (3:15). He, on the other hand, would "bruise the heel" of the seed. From this point on, I believe that Satan sought to prevent the seed

from being born, or to kill the seed once he was born. This helps to explain Satan's opposition against Israel (through whom the seed would come) in the Old Testament period. Once the birth of Messiah has taken place, Satan is apparently behind the attempt of Herod to kill the child (cf. Matt. 2). In the end, it was Satan's entering into Judas which brought about the scheme which resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus. Satan did not realize that "killing Messiah" was the divinely intended means of His bearing the sins of the world on the cross. My point here, however, is that Satan saw the killing of Messiah as the solution to the threat of Messiah and his kingdom.

JUST HOW WOULD SATAN envision killing our Lord by persuading Him to leap from the pinnacle of the temple? I can think of several ways. First, acting presumptuously would be sin, and sin (as he knew well) brought death. Second, if our Lord were to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, he might not be saved, and thus would die. Finally, Satan's angels might be employed to bring about the Messiah's death. Satan has cited a passage which, according to his interpretation, views the angels as God's instruments for protecting and rescuing Messiah. It is also the "fallen angels" who make up the lion's share of Satan's forces which oppose God. Thus it would seem to be Satan's fallen angel forces which interfered with the heavenly messenger in Daniel chapter 10. Could it be that Satan hoped to convince Jesus to jump, and then to thwart an angelic deliverance by calling in his own angelic forces? Such a plot is not too devious for one so evil and cunning as Satan.

ONCE AGAIN, OUR LORD did not respond by correcting every error in Satan's theology and methodology. He struck at the jugular vein of the matter, giving but one biblical response, one which terminated not only this temptation, but the entire session, which had lasted forty days. Our Lord's response was a biblical one: "*YOU SHALL NOT FORCE A TEST ON THE LORD YOUR GOD*"

The words which are Lord cited to Satan are found in Deuteronomy chapter 16, with a further descriptive statement: "*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massa* (Deut. 6:16).

If we want to understand what it means to "put God to the test" we must learn how Israel put God to the test there. THE ACCOUNT IS OUR OT STORY IN EXODUS 17.

From this text we can identify certain actions which is called "putting God to the test." Let us consider what some of the characteristics of testing God are, from this incident at Massah. Then

let us seek to determine how the third temptation of our Lord was similar, and thus a testing of God.

Characteristics of Testing God

(1) The Israelites put God to the test because they felt God was failing to meet their needs and to fulfil His promise. The land to which God promised to bring His people was described as a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8, 17; 13:5). It was one thing not to have these things in abundance; it was quite another to lack water, a basic necessity for life. The Israelites had come to Rephidim and there was no water there. It would seem that Adam and Eve also disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree because they felt that the knowledge of good and evil was an unmet need, worthy of disobedience.

To put the matter a little differently, **(2) the Israelites put God to the test when they realized that God’s purposes and leading brought them into adversity, rather than ease and comfort.**

In the Israelites’ protest against Moses and God, they spoke of the “good old days” in Egypt and contrasted them with their present circumstances (Exod. 17:3). Life was better then, they protested. It was so good, in fact, that they threatened to go back.

(3) The Israelites put God to the test because they doubted God’s good will and good purposes for their lives. The Israelites accused God of leading them into the wilderness to put them to kill them and their children and their cattle (Exod. 17:3).

(4) The Israelites put God to the test by resisting God’s leadership. The people grumbled against Moses and argued with him, but ultimately, they were resisting God.

(5) The Israelites put God to the test by insisting that God perform according to their expectations and demands. The Israelites put God to the test by determining His presence by His presents. The word of God was not sufficient, nor was God’s marvellous works for them in the past. They wanted God to act now, to give them what they wanted, when they wanted it, or they would refuse to acknowledge His presence among them. God’s presence among His people could only be proven by His on-going performance of miracles, so that none of their needs were unmet.

(6) The Israelites put God to the test by reversing the Father-Son relationship. Our Lord Jesus has just been designated as God's "Son" at His baptism (Luke 3:22). As God's Son, the Lord Jesus needed to be tested and proven, before He could be given all of the privileges of His sonship:

Sonship really was the issue of this temptation. Israel had failed to grasp what sonship entailed, or rebelled when they became aware of its price. Our Lord understood fully what sonship was all about, and thus each of His responses to Satan came from the one place in the Old Testament which most emphatically taught the meaning and implications of sonship.

WHAT SATAN IS SEEKING to accomplish in this temptation is even more bold, more evil, than that which happened at Massah. At Massah, Israel suffered from a genuine need of water. The need was not of their own making, but divinely brought about. They tested God by demanding that God meet the need in order to prove Himself worthy of their obedience and worship. In the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple, Satan is proposing that our Lord presumptuously create a need which forces God to intervene, based upon a text which was believed to teach that God would not allow any evil to happen to His Messiah.

AS WE ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE the relevance and application of our text to our own lives, let us remember that Christians are also, in a sense somewhat distinct from that of our Lord, "sons of God," who are to reign with Christ. As "sons of God," we are subject to testing and discipline (Heb. 12). We are also susceptible to the same temptations to which Adam and Eve and Israel (and virtually all mankind) have failed. Thus, the test of our Lord's sonship is very relevant to us as children of God.

THE SPECIFIC TEST OF OUR Lord's sonship was that of "putting God to the test." Why is it wrong to test God? Let me suggest several reasons why putting God to the test is sin.

(1) IT IS A SIN AGAINST our sonship and God's sovereignty. The father-son relationship is one with a clearly defined chain of command. The father is in authority over the son. The son is to trust and obey the father. The son is to wait until that time when the father installs him as the king.

For a child of God to put God, the Father, to the test is to reverse the authority structure which God has established. It is to forget that it is God who is to test us, not we who are to test God. It is we who need proving, not God. It is we who should serve God, not God who is our servant, in the sense of viewing Him as standing by, every ready to do our bidding. It is He who directs us, not we who are to direct Him. Is this not the essence of God's rebuke of Job? All too often, Christians are representing God as the servant of man, who is so eager to have followers that He is ready to do our bidding. Wrong! Sonship means that we are to obey, we are to serve, we are to suffer, if it pleases the Father.

Our Lord understood that the day of His enthronement was the prerogative of the Father (cf. Heb. 5:5). Thus, when pressed by His disciples concerning just when that day would be, our Lord left this matter in the Father's hands, not His own (Matt. 24:36). The disciples continued to press to learn the time, even after our Lord's resurrection, but our Lord responded, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

(2) IT IS A SIN AGAINST LOVE. Perfect love is inconsistent with fear (1 John 4:18), which is often the occasion when men seek to put God to the test. Israel feared that they would die in the wilderness. Love does not know fear. In addition to this, love does not doubt, but believes. The apostle Paul put it this way, "Love ... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Putting God to the test is not bearing, not believing, not hoping, and not enduring.

(3) IT IS A SIN AGAINST FAITH. Faith is simply believing God. It is taking God at His word, and not demanding continual signs and proofs. Job put it this way: "Thou He slay me I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15).

Faith is rooted and grounded in the promises of God. Many of the promises of the Bible are the assurance of future blessings or events. By their very nature, they are not present realities. It is the abuse of God's promises which is often the source of putting Him to the test. God promised He would bring Israel into a land of milk and honey, and they began to demand that God bless them now. As Israel and Satan (wrongly) understood Psalm 91, God promised to protect His Messiah from all harm and injury, and so he urged our Lord to force God to fulfil that promise then and there. This is all contrary to faith. The writer to the Hebrews reminds his readers that all of the Old Testament saints died without receiving the promises of God.

PUTTING GOD TO THE TEST IS SIN. On this we can all hopefully agree in principle. What

does this mean in practice? How do we put God to the test in our culture? Let me suggest several possibilities, which may open the door to seeing some of the ways in which you are in danger of sinning in this area.

(1) CHRISTIANS CAN PUT God to the test by acting on future promises as though they were present promises. The so-called “name it and claim it” Christians are sometimes (some might say often) guilty of claiming future promises as present realities, and thus the failure to be rich or healthy cannot be explained by the sovereign choice of God, but by one’s lack of faith, by one’s failure to possess God’s blessings. In such cases people are accused of sin for not “putting God to the test.” Let us remember that where there is one form of evil, Satan also has its opposite. Putting God to the test can have a very pious appearance, when in reality it is man’s demand that God jump through his own hoops.

Putting God to the test is often the result of our own impatience, of wanting now what God will give us later. Such impatience demands that God “hurry up” what He is doing. This is nothing new:

WOE TO THOSE WHO DRAW sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, “Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so that we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it” (Isa. 5:18-19).

(2) WRONGLY RESPONDING TO ADVERSITY. It is often in times of adversity that our tendency to put God to the test becomes evident. We may very well place conditions on God, things which He must do for us in order for us to acknowledge that He is present with us, and for us to worship Him. Thus, if we are sick and God doesn’t heal us, we question His presence and His goodness. If God doesn’t make our marriage heaven on earth or cause our wayward child to act as we think he should, we begin to function as though God were not with us. In effect, we have put conditions on God, things which He must do, if we are to worship and serve Him. This is putting God to the test, in my opinion.

(3) WE CAN PUT GOD TO THE TEST BY LIVING RECKLESSLY. There are some people who like to flirt with danger. Living on the ragged edge of survival, or death, or disaster is the thrill which keeps some of us going. Compulsive gamblers are often this way. Most Christians know better than to excuse gambling and so they do it in different ways, often sanctifying their recklessness by labelling it faith. “I couldn’t afford this car,” they tell us, “but I am trusting God to provide the payments.” Living by faith can lead us into danger, as Daniel and his three friends

learned, but faith is always evidenced by obedience to God's Word.

Faith is not foolishness attributed to trusting God, it is trusting God and forsaking folly. Let us be on guard about seeking to do that which is foolish by calling our actions "a step of faith." There are more than enough things to trust God to do, so that we do not need to lengthen the list of the impossible things we are looking to God to accomplish.

IN 1912 THE "UNSINKABLE" Titanic was launched in Liverpool, England. So haughty was the hoopla surrounding the Titanic's safety and structural integrity that it caused great anxiety in the heart of one God-fearing woman, whose family was unexpectedly transferred onto the gigantic liner for its maiden voyage. The woman was the mother of seven-year-old Eva Hart, who recalls that her family was saved from tragedy because of Mrs' Hart's spiritual convictions. Throughout the voyage, Mrs. Hart stayed awake at night waiting for disaster to strike, and thus was able to move her family to an upper deck almost immediately after the ship collided with an unseen iceberg. Because of her vigilance, the family did not join the 1,500 others who died that night.

After reading the shipbuilders' claims, Mrs. Hart believed--and so stated--"This is flying in the face of God!"

YOU SHALL NOT PUT the Lord God to the test.