

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 16, 2008

## Testing and Temptation

by Dan Trygg

"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, <sup>b</sup>returned from the Jordan and was led around <sup>1</sup>by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for <sup>a</sup>forty days, being tempted by the devil."  
Luke 4:1-2

This can be a somewhat controversial area of discussion. What is temptation? What is God's role in temptation? Does He ever tempt us? Was Jesus' capable of really being tempted? What was this incident all about? How can we combat temptation, when it comes? What power do we have to resist temptation? Are we ever tempted to the point of inability to resist? Can we ever say, "The devil *made me* do it?" Luke did not intend to answer all of these questions in his gospel. To do that, we would have to broaden our study of passages on this topic. Let us begin by looking more closely at what the word, "temptation" means.

**The Greek word for "test" and "temptation" is the same.** The word, *peirazō*, and related terms, also mean "to try, to examine, to make an attempt, to make proof or trial of". The word itself is neutral. It can be positive or negative, depending on the context. The primary idea is that **a temptation or test is an occasion that offers a choice or choices to the one being tested, positive or negative. The decisions the person makes expose or reveal his or her character, ability or maturity.** The "test" or "temptation" is not so much a pass/fail kind of situation, though that can sometimes be a result. Rather, it is an opportunity to show our *true colors* and the *focus* of our heart. Sometimes we may not totally fail, in that we do not choose to sin, but we may learn that we need to improve our *methods* or our *skills*. We will also see if it is God we are following, or our own devices.

**Tests or trials can be beneficial in that they are "reality checks"** that can keep us from an inflated notion of our competency, and they can help us zero in on areas where we need to grow. **On the negative side**, however, a "failed temptation", **a test where we might choose to do evil, can be disastrous in the consequences that may follow.** Satan would love to tie us up with more and more consequences like these. We have no idea how much God protects us from Satan's demands to "sift us" (Lk. 22:31), but we know that He puts a hedge of protection about those who are His (Job 1:9,10). This, too, is the reason why **Jesus teaches us to ask God *not* to lead us into temptation.** Such tests, when we are not yet ready, can be destructive, or set us back, if we do not choose well. **Sometimes we set ourselves up to be tested or tempted.** It is the grace of God if we should be spared from the potential dangers to which we expose ourselves.

**First, it is clear that God *does*, at times, lead us into temptation.** This might sound heretical, at first blush, but it *is* what the Bible tells us. The scriptures tell us that God tested Abraham (Heb. 11:7), the Israelites (Ex. 16:4; Deut. 31:1-3; Judg. 2:22; 3:1), and even "led Jesus up to be tested" (Matt. 4:1). Even Jesus' instruction to *ask* God to *not* lead us into temptation implies that He may do so, if we do not petition Him in this manner. When we understand how this statement fits together with the other principles that God has shared with us on this subject, it makes sense that He *would* test us (e.g., Ex. 20:18-20; Jas. 1:2-4). Testing is an important part of our growth process (Jas. 1:2-4), so we can *expect* God to test us.

**Secondly, the Bible clearly tells us that God does not test us "to evil"** (James 1:13). Now, some people interpret this verse as "God does not tempt anyone". The verse may *seem* to be saying that, but the intended meaning must come out of the context, ...both the immediate context of James, as well as the clear teaching of other parts of Scripture (e.g., Gen. 22:1). James' point is that God has no evil motives, and thus is "untemptable with regard to evil". Consequently, He Himself tests/tempts no one *toward evil*.

**Thirdly, it must also be clearly understood that**, just as He tested Abraham, the Israelites, and even Jesus, in the same way, **God *will* test us and allow us to be tested.** Because the word "test" is neutral, we must understand what God's motives or intentions are. Since He is good, **any tests He may lead us into are meant for our benefit and/or His glory.**

- **Generally, He will test us in order to more deeply establish and strengthen our character and walk** with Him by our successful obedience in the face of such a trial (Heb. 5:7-9; Jas. 1:2-4; I Pet. 5:6-11; Rev. 2:10).

- **At times, He will allow us to be tested to reveal to us an area of self-deception or weakness** (2 Chr. 32:31).

- **God will allow us to be tested in order to bring glory to Him by our response.** In the case of Job's testing, it is clear that Job's character was well-known to God (1:8). The purpose of the trials Job endured was to clearly demonstrate to the watching spiritual beings that Job would remain faithful to God, even though he experienced the loss of all his possessions, his loved ones, and even his health. **Without a test, there is no testimony.** The testimony of Job's life was that God was worth serving for *who He was*, not only for the benefits He brings. The victorious faith of Job brought God much glory before the angelic hosts. We are *also* on display, both before people in this natural world (Matt. 5:14-16; I Pet. 2:11,12; 3:13-18), and also before the spiritual world (Eph. 3:8-10; I Pet. 1:6-12). **God will allow us to be tested to reveal what a difference He makes in our lives, and how precious He is to us.**

**Fourth, every temptation is human** (I Cor. 10:13). That is, because it has to do with a human choice or response to some stimulus or opportunity to act out, how we respond *is within our power*. That is the essence of a test or temptation. It is an opportunity for human expression, either for good or ill. Another aspect of this is that **most temptations or tests are limited to the confines of human power and ability.** We are not generally seriously tempted to do things which human beings are not capable of doing. That is not temptation. That is delusion. The "humanness" of temptation implies that **other people have also experienced the same kinds of things we face**, no matter how bizarre and unusual they might seem. **The scenario might not be identical, but the general avenues of temptation have been experienced by others. We are not a special case.** There are others like us, who have experienced the similar things as we, and have overcome (I Pet. 5:9).

**God gives us two very important promises regarding the "humanness" of our temptations/tests:**

(1.) *God will not permit us to be tested beyond what we are able; and,*

(2.) *He will provide "the way of escape" together with every test, so that we might be able to endure.* It is important to see that the "way-of-escape" comes "together-with" each test. We might not recognize it, or know how, or when, to utilize it, ...but it *is* there in each situation.

**Fifth, the root of temptation**, no matter what may be the immediate *source* that presents the opportunity or suggestion to our minds, **is our own strong-desire in conjunction with our will** (Jas. 1:13-15). We are "drawn away" and lured/enticed by our own strong desires. **A temptation is rarely a cold, clear, rational choice. If we are to have victory over temptation, we must learn how to dial down, manage and say, "No!" to such "strong-desires".** An emotionally needy or topsy-turvy life will make it difficult to resist temptation when it comes (e.g., II Tim. 3:6,7). Also, **saying "No." to the flesh, including our emotions, is a developed ability which must be cultivated through discipline.** Just as learning to control inappropriate bodily functions takes *time* and *practice* for a child, controlling oneself in these other areas is a matter of conscious maturation. We have to work at learning alternative ways to deal with emotions, and practicing self-control. No progress will be made, if we do not take ownership of our own behavior. Ultimately, no one is to blame for our choices but *us*. We *can* do differently.

**Finally, God is able, and is faithful, to give us victory in temptation, if we will learn to trust in Him and obey His counsel.** He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24), and will always lead us to victory, if we will trust in Him and walk with Him (II Cor. 2:14). Often people expect God to do this in a *particular way*, and they miss the resources that He has made available to lead us in victory. **God generally will not "zap" us into victory. He usually requires active, responsible participation on our part.** He "leads us", meaning that we must "follow". This implies a process and a partnership with Him.