

*"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."*

*"But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."*

*"Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."*

*"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."*  
(1.COR 10:1-12).

Who were the people Paul is describing in this passage - the thousands who "fell in one day," the masses who were killed by snakes, and the others who were "destroyed of the destroyer"? These weren't Moabites, Canaanites, Philistines or any of the other heathen surrounding Israel. No, Paul is speaking here of believers - people of God's own choosing!

These people had witnessed incredible miracles. They'd been fed spiritual food by supernatural

# Tempting The Lord!

means. They'd drunk spiritual water from a rock Paul says was Christ Himself. They were well taught and well taken care of. Yet, Paul says, many of these same people were consumed by God's fiery wrath and destroyed by serpents.

The apostle tells us in verse 5 that these Israelites so displeased God, he "overthrew" them in the wilderness. The Hebrew word used here means, "He cast them out of His hand, scattering them to the ground like so much dust."

What does this mean? It was the Lord telling Israel, "I will not accept this from you! If you were innocent - if you weren't well trained, or hadn't received spiritual food from My hand, or hadn't seen evidence of My glory - then I would deal with you. But in spite of My many blessings to you, you've chosen lusts and idols. So, now I'm going to scatter you. I'm casting you out of My hands completely!"

How could this be? Why would the Lord deal so severely with His own people after they'd benefited so fully from Him?

According to Paul, 23,000 of them died as a result of their fornication and idolatry. And others were destroyed because of their murmuring and complaining. Finally, still others were killed by venomous snake bites. What did this last group do to warrant their deaths? Paul tells us very clearly in verse 9: They tempted Christ! *"Neither let us*

*tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted..."* (VERSE 9).

We can understand why God would deal severely with fornicators, idolaters and murmurers. But I want to focus on this particular sin of tempting Christ. What does Paul mean when he says we *"tempt the Lord"*?

The apostle is referring here to an episode in Exodus 17. The Israelites had just experienced the miracle of manna - a white wafer containing all the nutrition they needed to sustain them. This "small, round thing" appeared on the ground in their midst every day. The people didn't earn or merit this supernatural food; the Lord fed it to them by His grace alone. All they had to do was gather it up.

But now they had no water. They had come to a place called Marah, where the water was too bitter to drink. Once again they were in a crisis, facing yet another test. God had met their hunger, but not their thirst!

Immediately, the people began chiding their leader, Moses. They accused him of being a heartless liar who had led them into the wilderness to destroy them. They even spoke of stoning him.

## **The Israelites Didn't Know It - But They Were Being Tested!**

You may wonder - why is God always testing His people this way? Why do we often face one test after another in life? And why

do our tests only seem to increase in intensity and force?

The tests that God brought upon Israel certainly intensified. Whenever the people didn't learn a particular lesson the first time, the Lord brought an even stronger test. And when they didn't learn it that time, He brought yet another test and intensified it as well. Now they failed to trust God at the waters of Marah - which meant an even stronger test of faith awaited them!

As we read Paul's passage today, most of us assume, "God was trying to chisel away Israel's character defects. He wanted to cut away the things that were unlike Him - to expose their weaknesses, so they could be more Christ-like."

That's true. Yet, this was only a part of what God was doing in Israel. We don't realize our Lord is after so much more when He brings us into crisis situations. Often He does this because He wants us to learn something important about Himself!

Think about it: The Bible says we're God's chosen people, kings and priests unto Him. Just as His people did under the Old Covenant, we feast on His manna, which is His Word. We drink of the same Rock, which is Christ. And we enjoy better promises and a better covenant. We've been delivered out of bondage, having crossed our own Red Sea. And we've watched as God has destroyed the satanic powers that once held us.

**Yet, like Israel, we also doubt God, murmuring and complaining against Him, in spite of all His blessings to us.** We turn to idols and lusts. And we tempt Him, just as the Israelites did. In short, we have not learned our lessons.

### **Like Israel, Many Believers Today End Up At A Place Of Great Trial And Testing.**

Today, the Lord often brings us to a place like Marah, where the waters of life are bitter. And, once there, we too face unfulfilled thirst, nagging questions and grave doubts.

You may protest, "No - you can't compare me to those idolatrous, fornicating Israelites! Moses himself said they were hardhearted - a stiff-necked people bent on back-

sliding. I'm not like that at all. I want the Lord. You can't say I'm like them!

But the poor Israelites didn't recognize these things about themselves. They didn't realize what was in their hearts, until their time of testing came. And I believe the same is true of God's people today. The prophet Jeremiah writes, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" (JER 17:9).

You have to remember - these are the same people who would later tremble before the Lord at Mount Sinai after hearing His commandments. They would quickly answer, "Everything God has said, we will do. We'll obey every command!"

And the Israelites sincerely meant every word they said. They were full of the fear of God, and were convinced they wouldn't fail to honor His Word. But they had no idea what was in their hearts. In truth, they were spiritually bankrupt!

You see, Israel was living off the experience of their pastor and teacher, Moses. They had no faith of their own. And when God removed Moses from their midst, they backslid within forty days!

The same thing happens with many Christians today. When they hear God's Word preached, they eagerly pledge to obey it with all their hearts. But in reality, they're living off someone else's experience. They feed on teaching tapes, seminars, the revelations of their pastors - and **they have no deep experience of their own with Christ.**

Beloved, you cannot get God's true revelation from someone else. A preacher can stir and inspire you, and you may learn to spout off biblical precepts. But until you have your own experience with Jesus and develop a history with Him, you can't know Him. His Word has to work its way into your heart, until it becomes a living experience!

The disciples, too, had no idea what was in their hearts - but Jesus did. And He brought them to a place of testing that exposed it all. He told the twelve to get in a boat and cross the sea, knowing full well a storm would soon envelop them.

Now, these men thought they were trusting followers of the Master. After all, they'd seen thousands of people fed with just a handful of fish and a few loaves of bread. So, as they stepped into the boat, they probably thought they'd never doubt Jesus again.

Yet, it's one thing to see miracle-working power in your pastor's life, and quite another to experience it for yourself. Now, as the winds began blowing and the waves rose higher, the disciples' test came. Soon the boat filled with water, and the men started bailing as fast as they could. In just minutes, however, they knew their ship was going to sink.

Listen to what emerged from these men's hearts in their time of testing: "Lord, don't you care that we're all about to die? We're going down! Help us, Jesus. Are you God or not? Don't you care about us?"

Jesus' very own disciples were tempting Him! Indeed, they spoke almost the very same words to Jesus that the Israelites had spoken to Moses: "*...they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?*" (EXODUS 17:7)

Yet Jesus knew all along what He was doing. He could have commanded the winds and waves to cease long before they did. Such power was always present in Him. But instead, He allowed His disciples to be tested - in a literal life-or-death situation!

### **What Does It Mean to Tempt the Lord?**

Tempting the Lord begins when God allows a crisis in our lives to intensify. Why does He do this? What is He after? Our Lord allows this to happen so He can get at the last roots of our unbelief! His Spirit goes into every chamber of our hearts, searching out the most damnable things - pride, self-sufficiency and all else that hinders His fullness in us.

The psalmist writes of Israel's sin, "*They tempted God in their heart...*" (PSA 78:18). The Hebrew meaning of this phrase indicates the Israelites were "tested beyond endurance." This means they had no human means left to provide for themselves. And when they came to such a place, they believed God

had abandoned them, remaining silent and out of sight.

In short, this is what it means to tempt God. It happens when His chosen, blessed ones are placed in the fires of testing - and their crisis keeps growing more intense until fear grips their hearts, and suddenly they cry, "Lord, where are You? Where is my deliverance? Why aren't You on the scene? Are You with me or not?"

It's impossible for an unsaved person to tempt the Lord. Such a person doesn't acknowledge God in any area of his life. To him, everything that happens is either good luck or bad luck. Only those who are closest to the Lord can tempt Him - those who have seen His power, tasted His mercy and grace, and been called to walk by faith.

Even the righteous John the Baptist faced the kind of trial that can lead to tempting God. As he sat in prison, he must have wondered where God was in his situation. Word had come back to him of all the wonderful things Jesus was doing - healing people, performing miracles, drawing crowds who'd once flocked to John. And now here he sat alone, awaiting execution.

John had known he had to decrease so Christ could increase. But now the thought crossed his mind, "Decrease, yes - but death? Why do I have to die if Jesus is truly God? If He's performing all these wonders for others, why can't He deliver me? Lord, this is all too much to endure!" (Remember, Christ had not yet removed the sting of death.)

The last words Jesus sent to John were incredibly significant: "***Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.***" (MATT 11:6). Christ was telling this godly servant, "Don't be offended at me, John. You know I only do what I see and hear from the Father. He has a plan in all this, and He is worthy to be trusted. If He wanted me to come and release you, you know I would be there in a moment. You can rest assured that whatever comes of this, it will be to His glory. And it will mean eternal glory for you!"

"You're enduring your final test, John. Don't let doubt rob you of your faith! Instead, rest in the Father's love and faithfulness to you. You're not being judged. On

the contrary, you are greatly honored in His eyes. Just hold steady!"

I believe John did endure. When he was finally beheaded by Herod, he went home to glory full of faith and honor!

### **Moses Knew What Tempting The Lord Was All About In Israel's Situation.**

They had failed to trust God at the waters of Marah, so God intensified their trial at Rephidim, where "*...there was no water for the people to drink.*" (EX 17:1).

You have to understand, this was no small crisis Israel was facing now. A human being can go for weeks without eating, but only a few days without water. And now, when Israel came to Rephidim, there was no water in sight. Before long, children were crying and families grew faint from thirst. It was a critical situation.

Yet Moses understood the ways of the Lord - and he knew just what was happening with Israel. He realized God was letting His people be stretched beyond measure. Why? He wanted them to cast themselves completely into His care. He longed to see them rise up in faith and say, "God is able!"

Scripture then tells us, "*(Moses) called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?*" (EX 17:7).

The words "Massah" and "Meribah" both mean the same thing: "a place of trial and testing." Moses ran through the camp crying, "This is Massah - a test, a trial! It isn't the end. God hasn't forsaken us. So, don't give in. Keep holding on! The Lord is looking for faith, wanting to know what's in our hearts. He knows how to meet our need. He only wants us to trust Him for another miracle!"

You know the rest of the story. Tragically, Israel didn't trust the Lord. So God instructed Moses to pick up his rod, go to Horeb and strike a certain rock there. When Moses hit the rock, water came gushing out to meet Israel's thirst. The Lord proved once again He was with His people - in spite of their unbelief!

I ask you - how did Israel tempt the Lord in this episode? Was it in their anger toward Moses - their desire

to kill God's prophet? Was it in their awful murmuring? Or, was it in their idolatrous fornication?

None of these things was the real issue. Here is how Israel tempted God: "*...they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?*" (VERSE 7).

God had that water in storage all along. He could have supplied it to Israel at the first pangs of their thirst. But instead, He waited. His heart yearned for His special, chosen people to recognize His love for them and cast themselves into His faithful arms. But once again, they failed!

So, God tried them yet again - this time by allowing them to hunger. Moses later said, "*...the LORD thy God... humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger... to prove thee...*" (DEUT 8:2,3).

Here was another test of faith. Would Israel hold their empty stomachs and wait for God to send them bread? Would they encourage one another toward faith, saying, "God opened the Red Sea for us. And He sweetened the bitter waters of Marah. We know He's faithful to His word. So, Lord - we trust You to feed us. Live or die, we are Yours!"

That's all God was waiting to hear!

### **We Really Do Not Know What Is In Our Hearts.**

It doesn't matter how many years we've walked with the Lord, how many hours we've prayed, or how much Bible knowledge we've acquired. If God sees something in us that isn't of faith - an area where we haven't trusted Him to empower us to overcome - He will take us to "Massah." He'll put us in a situation that's humanly impossible - and we'll be severely tested!

For example, you may honestly believe you have a loving heart toward all your brothers and sisters in Christ. "The Lord has given me love for everyone," you testify. But Jesus knows you have a problem in one area: you go ballistic whenever someone abuses your love or kindness. When this happens, you carry a continual hurt inside, yet you continue saying you love that person.

How does God get at that kind of hypocrisy in you? He brings you to a place of testing. He allows a mean, in-your-face Christian to

have a go at you! Suddenly, you find yourself praying, "Lord, why did you bring that person into my life? He's a thorn in my flesh! I've tried to serve you faithfully - but all I get in return is this abuse!"

The Lord has you at Massah! He's trying to get at something in you. He wants you to be able to rise up in your situation and shout, "I know my God is with me. My steps are ordered by Him. He'll see me through all my hurt and anguish!"

Here's another example: You are a chosen vessel of the Lord - drinking His living water, feasting on His Word, witnessing mighty deliverances in your life. Yet there remains in you one area where sin reigns. You still have one, last besetting sin - an evil habit, passion or lust.

You hate this sin. You've made promise after promise to God to do better, but you've never conquered it. You've wept over your habit, begging the Lord to deliver you. You've poured over books and tapes trying to find a key to freedom. Yet you've never found an answer. And for years now you've lived in fear of exposure.

Beloved, you're going to end up at Massah - in the test of your life! Talk about intensity; all hell will break loose in your situation. The Lord will allow you to be tempted by the devil, and suddenly you'll be overwhelmed by your lust. Satan will try to sift you as wheat!

You'll think you have the blackest heart in the world. You'll believe you've been given over to your sin. And you'll end up on your face, dumbfounded, crying out, "Lord, what's going on? Where has all this lust come from? I'm being tempted more now than when I first started seeking Your deliverance. I'm losing ground!"

Doubts will flood your mind. You'll wonder, "How could God possibly allow this thing in my life? It has

gone on for years. How could he make all those promises to me, and yet not be faithful to His Word? Is He with me or not?"

### God Has Brought You To The Place Of Proving!

*"...I proved thee at the waters of Meribah..."* (PSA 81:7).

Beloved, God wants you to know He could have delivered you at the sound of your first cry. The fact is, the whole time you've been weeping, striving and trying to fight your way out, He has had the power to cast any evil thing out of you.

"Then why hasn't He done it?" you ask. "Is He penalizing me? Why has He made me endure such a struggle?"

As you consider Israel's crisis, you might be tempted to say, "God, aren't you expecting too much from these people? They're scared, and rightly so. After all, no one can live without water. How could they be tempting You, when they're just crying out of their need?"

Yet you have to remember - these people had been well fed and well taught, immersed in signs, wonders and miracles. They weren't spiritual novices. And they weren't without a caring shepherd. Every day they had a visible, sheltering cloud as evidence that God was present with them. And every night they had the comforting glow of a fire in the sky. Each morning they found manna on the ground, faithfully sent from heaven. God had provided Israel with everything they needed to build their faith!

Our Lord isn't making small talk when He warns, **"Without faith you cannot please me. You must truly believe that I AM - and that I will always reward faith.** Therefore, I expect my well-fed, well-trained children to trust in Me!"

What about the test you've been facing? What does God want from you in your difficult time?

He wants you to believe His Word - His promises! He wants you to fully trust that He's with you in your struggle. It doesn't matter if all hell is coming at you. His presence will never be taken from you, even in the midst of your fears and tears. No dart of the devil - no powerful attack against you - will destroy you. Your Father already has a plan of deliverance in place for you!

**He's waiting for you simply to cling to Him in blind trust.** He wants you to be able to face all your ferocious temptations, and say, "I may not understand this - but I know my Lord will not forsake me. Live or die, sink or swim, I'm trusting Him to see me through!"

Your battle will end only when you come to fully trust in the Lord, believing He's with you in power and in love. So, put aside every thought that God has ignored you or shut His eyes to your circumstances. That is tempting Him - putting Him to a test to prove His faithfulness. Yet He has already proven it many times over!

Dear saint, you need not fear the serpent. Paul ends the passage with a promise: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (1.COR 10:13).

God is saying to you, "You're not going down. I'm with you through all of this! If you'll just seek my face and trust me, I will bring you through. I'll enable you to stand still and bear anything that comes - because I am with you always!"

by David Wilkerson  
April 19, 1999

Copyright © 1999 by World Challenge, Lindale Texas

\*\*\*\*\*

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 888, COFFS HARBOUR NSW 2450, AUSTRALIA