



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

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TEMPTING GOD

What does it mean to tempt God? We're familiar with the term and concept of "tempting fate" but Jesus' response to the devil's temptation of "...*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*" (Mat. 4:7) tells us something deeper than "tempting fate." First, let's examine this confrontation between Jesus and the devil, and then why it is still relevant to us today.

In Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Mat. 4), the devil takes Jesus to a high point of the temple in Jerusalem (v. 5) and dares Jesus to provide proof that He is the Son of God:

And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself

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down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
(Mat. 4:6)

The temptation is multifaceted. One aspect of this temptation is for Jesus to show a sign for the purpose of popular acclaim by people who will have seen someone survive a fall hundreds of feet in distance. Although Jesus will go on to perform many miracles, the devil's call for such a sign is a temptation to perform this feat in place of Jesus' ultimate sign of death and resurrection - as Jesus later points out to Pharisees who ask for a sign after he's just healed a blind man (Mat. 12:38-42). So, the devil offers what sounds like a shortcut to instill belief in Jesus by the masses.

The other aspect of this temptation is found in the devil's misquoting of David's Psalm 91:11-12. The full, correct passage is

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

David's full quote notes that the promise of angels having charge over you is specific to those who walk in the appointed ways. That is, if you are truly walking the path you should be - in pursuit of God and His ways - then, you will have such guidance and care if you stumble on that path. If you are not walking that path, no such promise is made.

The devil omits the key clause "*to keep thee in all thy ways*," which alters the passage's message somewhat. The devil's misquote sells the message that God will deliver you from any given danger. Despite this misuse of the scripture, Jesus' response is not aimed directly at the fact that the devil has misquoted David. Rather, Jesus notes that the scripture also says "...*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*" (Mat. 4:7). So, how does this quoted scripture foil the devil's temptation, and what do we learn from that today?

We have to take a few steps back to understand this scripture's origin. Jesus is quoting Moses from Deuteronomy 6:16, but in that scripture, Moses is referring to an earlier incident in Exodus 17. In their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites come to Rephidim, have no water, and they are not hesitant to complain to Moses about their thirst. Moses asks them, *"...Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?"* (Exo. 17:2). As the people thirst, they complain that they were brought out of Egypt only to die of thirst. God has Moses strike a rock so that water comes from it. This location is then named *"...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?"* (Exo. 17:7). Moses brings this event back up in reading the commandments, statutes, and judgments from God to the people in Deuteronomy 6 so that they would keep them in the promised land: *"Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah"* (v. 16). So tempting God has been mentioned by Moses and quoted by Jesus, but what does it mean to tempt God?

God is not tempted in the sense that we consider ourselves tempted. That is, our temptation is delivered as an enticing invitation to give in to sin that was aimed at eliciting our lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and/or pride of life (1 John 2:16). We may act on said temptation in impulse, or unfortunately, give into the temptation willingly and knowingly (Heb. 10:26). Conversely, God is not enticed by humans dangling a good time in front of Him. In the aforementioned instance with Moses and the people in Exodus 17, God was not tempted in the sense we may think of: "I would really like to punish these complainers..." Rather, the people were asking for a situation for which they were not ready, essentially daring God. How do you know that God will deliver you from danger? Or rather, how do you know that God has already delivered you from danger? First, you have to be in danger. So, when the people clamor to be delivered from danger (having already been de-

livered from danger in Egypt...) after already having been shown a path to follow, a leader to follow, and sustenance through manna when they doubted themselves right off of the path, they are essentially asking for danger. God can't deliver them from danger unless there's danger in which to be.

Many of us are probably familiar with this in another form: Patience. Most of us at some point in time have desired to be more patient. It does make waiting easier, after all. However, when we have become a more patient person, it's not because God sprinkled more patience points into us overnight. Usually, we have encountered trying times which put things in perspective for us. As a result, we're a little more patient than we were. This is by no means a warning to avoid praying for patience (or deliverance from evil). Instead, it's a reminder that God's gifts, such as patience, aren't gift-wrapped with a sparkling bow and a neon sign that says "patience." His gifts often come through complex interconnected events, trials, and people, and *"...we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom. 8:28; See *The Harvester* December 2023 for notes on this verse). The same is true for danger and the Israelites' perception of it in Exodus 17. Should God create danger for us just because we demand the rescue and a display of His might and power in the rescue? Doing so forfeits the right to expect preservation, because we're certainly not walking the appointed path if that's our attitude and approach.

Additionally, should we create the danger ourselves to force God to rescue us? Beyond physical threat of harm, should we deliberately put ourselves in any situation with threat to our mind, body, or soul with the intent of "forcing" God to respond to us? This is tempting God. Not that God is tempted by these things, but rather that we are attempting to get God to respond in the way that we want - our path.

Returning to the confrontation between the devil and Jesus,

we can now view the exchange under a new lens. The devil has called for Jesus to deliberately put Himself in physical danger by casting himself off of this high porch of the temple, claiming God is required to save him (via the misquote from Psalms). Jesus responds that deliberately putting His body in harm's way will certainly take him off the appointed way (as His purpose is the death and resurrection to come) by attempting to force God's response.

Jesus did many amazing and miraculous things in His time on earth. We would call these things superhuman. Curing the blind, healing the paralyzed, expelling demons, and raising the dead would all sound like superpowers. Most amazingly, Jesus used none of these while the devil tempted Him in the wilderness. Furthermore, this took place after Jesus went 40 days and nights without food. In a nation as blessed as the United States, we get "hangry" and ready to lash out after 40 minutes without food. How ready we would be to give in when the devil tempted Jesus with bread during that time (Mat. 4:3). Jesus faced superhuman temptation and used only human responses - no miracles, just scripture. We have such power too. Jesus' responses to all of the devil's temptations provide examples for our own confrontations with temptation. The specific response of study, to not tempt God, is Jesus' example and reminder to not think we can force God to aid us in our own misled path. Instead, remember to walk in God's provided path. As with the Israelites, we have been shown a path (Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:3-5), we have been given a leader to follow (Jesus), and we have sustenance on the journey along that path (God's grace and Word). We should have neither thought nor reason to tempt the Lord our God.

BEN

**A SHORTCUT IS
OFTEN TEMPTATION
IN DISGUISE**

FROM THE SCRIPTURES: ENCOURAGEMENT DURING TEMPTATION

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)

For in that he [Jesus] himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Heb. 2:18)

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (Jas. 1:2-3)

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (Jas. 1:12)

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: (2 Pet. 2:9)

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Rev. 3:10)

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

One of the grandest blessings of being a member the Lord's church is spending time and fellowship with other Christians. When we surround ourselves thusly, we find it easier to avoid sin. Being among the right people can be a big difference. Our adversary, the devil, knows this. He rarely tempts Christians when they are in a group because they are able to draw strength and encouragement from one another. Remember how Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4, at a time when it seemed that Christ was alone and vulnerable? And just as a lion will chase the stray antelope rather than the rest of the herd, Satan will try to tempt us most when we are away from the "house of God."

What happens when we are missing the church services? What are we doing instead? Some may be preaching the Truth to lost souls or others may be doing some form of good work. That is commendable. But what about the rest of us? What are we doing when we neglect the church services? Are we home watching some TV program display all the sensual lewdness and violence that a mind can stand? Are we at the ball game watching our children play and thus letting them know that we care more about sports than religious matters? Are we in a place where we don't belong, where we will be tempted to do wrong? These are just a few examples of things to think about next time we decide to "*forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*" If Christ is truly our Shepherd and we are His followers, then we should be found with the rest of the flock -- whenever the "doors" are open!

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THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
June 1 - 6	Taylor's Cross Roads Roanoke, AL	Hunter Bulger, David Burnham, & Keith Dunlap
June 1 - 6	Goochtown Eubank, KY	Various Speakers
June 12 - 15	Ashlock Near Celina, TN	Hunter Bulger (Prattville, AL)
June 15 - 20	Ephesus Ephesus, GA	Mark Carpenter (Woodland, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. In which book of the Bible does the story of Noah's ark appear?
2. What is the "chorus" in Psalm 136 which is repeated in every verse?
3. What is the name of the angel who appeared to Mary?
4. Which prophet is recorded as having an earnest prayer for no rain answered?
5. To whom was the Revelation of Jesus Christ given?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. What kind of leaves did Adam and Eve sew together to make clothes for themselves? FIG (Gen. 3:7)
2. Which son did Jacob not send to Egypt for grain during the famine? BENJAMIN (Gen. 42:4)
3. What was Jonah found doing on the ship while the storm was raging? SLEEPING (Jon. 1:5)
4. Which disciple tried to walk on water, as Jesus did? (SIMON) PETER (Mat. 14:29)
5. In the parable of the ten virgins, what were they waiting for? THE BRIDEGROOM (Mat. 25:1)