

Testing – Revealing True Strength

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Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up into the **wilderness** by the Spirit to be **put to the test** by the **Accuser**. ² And since he had **fasted** forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was **hungry**.

³ And when **the tester/tempter** came, he said to him, “**If you’re God’s Son**, tell these stones to become loaves of **bread**.”

⁴ But in answer he said, “It stands written,

‘Not on **bread** alone shall the **Human** live,
but on every **word** that goes forth from God’s mouth.’” [Deut 8:3]

⁵ Then the **Accuser** takes him into the **holy city** and set him on the highest point of the **temple** ⁶ and says to him, “**If you’re God’s Son**, throw yourself down, for it stands written,

‘To his angels He’ll give orders about you...,’ and
‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” [Psa 91:11-12]

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it stands written,

‘You shall not put the **LORD** your God to **the test**.’” [Deut 6:16]

⁸ Again, the **Accuser** takes him to a very high mountain and shows him all the **kingdoms of the world** and their **glory**. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these things I’ll give to you, if you fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Then Jesus says to him, “Be gone, **Satan** (Accuser)! For it is written,

‘The **Lord** your God you shall **worship**
and to him alone shall you give reverent service.’” [Deut 6:13]

¹¹ Then the Accuser leaves him, and angels came and began serving him.

Matthew 6:25

²⁵ ...I tell you, refuse to be anxious any more about your life (*psyché*), what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink, or about your body (*soma*), what you’ll wear. Isn’t your life something more than food, and your body than clothing?

James 1:12-15

¹² Blessed is the man who endures testing, for when he has become proven, he will receive the crown of life, which he promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one when he is being tested say, “I am being put to the test / tempted from God,” for God is invulnerable to testing by evils, but he himself tests / tempts no one. ¹⁴ But everyone is put to the test by their own desire as they are lured and enticed. ¹⁵ Then when the desire has conceived, it gives birth to a sin, but the sin when it is fully completed brings forth death.

Romans 7:7-8, 13, 15, 18

⁷ What then shall we say? Is the law sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known coveting/desire if the law had not said, “*You shall not covet/desire*.” [Exod. 20:17] ⁸ But Sin, taking a starting point through the commandment, worked in me all kinds of desire... ¹³ ...But it was Sin – in order that sin may become clearly visible by working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might become sinful beyond measure through the commandment... ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ...¹⁸ ... For to will the good is right there with me, but to do the good, no!

¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the bad I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Genesis 3:6

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom she took some and ate it.

Psalm 91:10-12

¹⁰ No evil will be allowed to befall you.... ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

² God led you these forty years in the wilderness ... testing you to know what was in your heart

³ And he ... let you hunger and fed you with manna ... that he might make you know that the human does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 6:13-14, 16

¹³ It is Yahweh your God that you shall fear/worship. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ¹⁴ You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you ¹⁶ You shall not put Yahweh your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah ("Testing").

Tempting and Testing – The Coming of the Accuser

God celebrated Jesus and gave a sign of the Spirit's presence/anointing with him at baptism.

That Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be put to the test/tempted (*peirasmos*). One word for both harsh, negative "testing" and alluring, deceptively attractive "temptation."

Both challenge integrity, commitment, faithfulness. We experience tests and temptations as deeply personal. Here we're given an external view, like Job 1-2. The Satan, the Accuser (*diabolos*, slanderer, devil) seems to appear in personal confrontation. God's voice... Satan's.

The narrative is stylized, simple, formulaic. It avoids taking us into Jesus' psychology – like our inner struggles where we experience the core of testing/temptation. Paul and James focus on desire, law, human choice and weakness. Sin personified. Desires from within.

Here, we're given a glimpse of the coming battle as Jesus "binds the strong man." (Mt. 12:28-29)

A curtain is pulled back. Jesus has fasted for 40 days. The Accuser thinks he'll be weakened.

The Test – Challenge and Response

The first two challenges strike directly at Jesus' experience at baptism: "*If you are the Son of God.*" Is it true? Use it. Show it. If it's doubtful, prove it. You can't trust something that's not demonstrated. Turn stones to bread for yourself. Force God's hand, ask for a sign that can't be doubted. Make God prove himself. He can do it. He's even promised. Israel after Exodus faced testing in the wilderness and failed. Now God responds, I'll take it for you.

The third is the fundamental challenge of One God. God and Mammon. It's faced by all of us on all levels. Can we see God in the face of Jesus? Who are we? Who is God? Can God be Love? We face the challenge every day in ordinary choices that we make, anxieties we refuse.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, "The Grand Inquisitor": He sees these three temptations embodying the whole history of humanity. Humans are too weak to face them. The church, to succeed, chose to reject Jesus' responses and take the side of the Accuser.

God and the Human Condition

Human choices from Eve to International politics to religious identity to our most private prayers and aspirations all reflect the nature of humans as "tested," "tempted." We go against our own ideals. In Jesus, God joins us in the human struggle and gives us hope.