

EXODUS

v o l u m e 2

Testing (Exodus 16:1-17:7)

Bottom Line: God will sometimes test us to either remind us of something about Him, or to show us something new about Him.

**When was the last test that you studied for? (It may be a looooong time for some of us!)
How did you do?**

The thing about tests is that they reveal two things about us: what we *do* know and what we *don't* know. In the same way, God will sometimes test us. He tests our faith in ways that remind us of what we already know about God, but also to reveal to us ways that we can learn and grow in our faith in Him. This is exactly what God did to the Israelites. The Israelites had been delivered from Egypt and on their trek to the promised land they found themselves in the wilderness. They complained to Moses and Aaron that they were hungry, so God tells Moses that He will send them “bread from heaven” each day and that they should only gather a day’s portion—no more, no less. God said He did this “to test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” (Exodus 16:4). God was trying to prove to the Israelites that He could be trusted with their daily provision.

Why would God try to show the Israelites something new about Himself through testing them rather than just telling them? How does “experiencing” God in different ways deepen our faith compared to merely “knowing” God in different ways? How can we deepen our understanding of God through experience rather than just knowledge?

The Israelites were in a similar situation only a month prior to this. If you remember, immediately after fleeing Egypt, God led the Israelites to Marah and they couldn’t drink the water there because it was bitter. They complained about this to Moses and God miraculously turned the bitter water to sweet (Exodus 15:22-27). Now, only a month later, the Israelites were in a similar position, but instead of relying upon God to provide for them, they took to complaining again. They had every reason to trust God in this situation, given that He had already proven His faithfulness to provide for them, but they didn’t take the time to remember what the Lord had done. If the test with the manna was meant to show the Israelites something they already knew about God, they certainly failed.

How do our experiences with God in the past affect our behavior in the present? How do they affect our view of the future? How does our behavior in trying times, whether good or bad, affect our witness to the world?

In what ways has God proven His faithfulness to you in the past?

The Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron that they were hungry, but Moses made sure to inform them that they weren’t grumbling against them, but against God (v.8). This raises two questions:

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1) In what way were the Israelites' complaints actually complaints against God? What does this tell us about God's control over our seasons of lack? Likewise, what does it tell us about God's control over our seasons of abundance? Is it ever wrong to bring our complaints to the Lord? What is the difference between "grumbling/complaining" and "petitioning" the Lord? (Read 1 Peter 5:7).

2) Who are the "Moses and Aaron's" in our lives that we sometimes try and blame for our circumstances? In what ways do we look to them to make things better? What kind of damage can this do to our relationships? Our faith?

At this point, it is important that we make a crucial clarification. Just because God sometimes tests us with hard trials does not mean that every hard trial is a test from God. Sometimes we go through difficult situations as a consequence of our own sin. A way to help determine whether our current situation is a "test" or not is to look back at the circumstances that led us to where we are. The Israelites were led into the wilderness by a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of cloud by night—God's very presence. In other words, the situation they found themselves in was a result of their obedience, not their disobedience. They should have trusted that God wouldn't lead them into a difficult place if it wasn't for a good reason. By thinking honestly about *how* we got where we are, we can more easily determine whether we are being tested by God or whether we are merely facing the consequences of our actions (see 1 Peter 2:19-20).

What is the danger in mistakenly interpreting sinful consequences as a test from God and vice-versa? What is a proper response if we realize we are being tested? Likewise, what is a proper response if we realize our situation is a result of our sin?

Have you experienced any "tests" in your life? What was it that God was trying to reinforce in you? What was it that God was trying to teach you?

Reflection: Read these aloud, using your discretion about which questions should be pondered and which questions should be discussed.

Are you currently experiencing a difficult season or situation? Think over the circumstances that led you there. Is it possible this is a test from the Lord? If so, what do you think this test is designed to show you that you already know? What do you think it's trying to show you that you don't know? How can you remember God's faithfulness in a way that helps you persevere in this situation? What can you do to grow in the area of faith that God is testing you in?

Is it possible your situation is a result of your sin? If so, what does repentance look like for you? Are you misplacing the blame for this situation on somebody else? What steps can you take to prevent this situation from happening again?