

When God Writes the Test

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Mark 1:9-15 ⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from¹ the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. ¹⁴ Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom¹ of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Back in the early 80s three students wrote the SAT board to point out that there was a mistake on the SAT. The board reviewed the test and realized they were right. They removed that question from the test and adjusted all the scores accordingly. For some people this was a good thing, their score went up a little. For others a point lower meant they didn't make it into their preferred university or lost their scholarship.

It used to be that how well you did on the SAT could have a huge impact on your life. But no test was ever as important as the one we just read about.

Jesus is thrown by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested. The result of this test would mean life or death for the whole world. Good thing we already know that Jesus was victorious, and because He was victorious, we win.

Even though the victory is ours through Jesus like Abraham, Noah, David, Daniel God still tests our faith. Unlike the SAT these tests do not decide our fate. Christ already resisted temptation his grade is given to us. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us

Heb 4:15 [He] was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Yet even though the victory is already ours, God does still allow Satan to tempt us, and in that temptation our faith is tested.

We are tempted by our own flesh.

James 1:14-15 ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Our sinful flesh wishes only to fulfill our own desires and to do everything the easy way. Why spend time with your kids when you can just turn on the TV? Why get to know your spouse when you can go hang out at the bar? Why find a way to help others when I can spend the time making my life easier?

James reminds us that each of us is tempted by our **own desires**. One person is enticed by alcohol, another by gambling, another by TV, another perhaps even by reading books. Even reading can become a sin if we neglect our duties. The point is that while we easily point out the excesses of someone else, we don't as easily notice our own sinful desires. Balaam, a prophet of the Lord was tempted by gold and fine clothing. The Lord had to rebuke Balaam through the mouth of a donkey. What are the desires that you are tempted by?

These temptations are with us every day. How can we resist when daily we are betrayed by our own heart desiring that which we know is not what we should be wanting or doing.

Jesus reminds us: **Matthew 26:41 The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.**

The great thing about the tests that God gives us is that the answer to every question is the same: JESUS.

Before he was tempted Jesus was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit to give him the strength to resist Satan in the wilderness. In our baptism we too have been blessed with the power of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

However more importantly we have been granted this knowledge, our sins are washed away through Jesus Christ.

Imagine walking a tight rope 3,000 feet off the ground. Now imagine walking that same tight rope two inches off the ground. Through Jesus our failure no longer mean death because our sins are forgiven in him. We might fall of the rope every day, but we are not falling to our death. We are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:38-39 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are tempted by the world in which we live.

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Each day we face people whose sins test our attempts to be loving and honest children of God. Our spouse, our children, our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, all these and others frustrate us to the point that we feel justified in responding with impatience and anger. Sometimes even a simple stranger passing us on the road can really get our goat.

When we allow their sin to become our sin we lose. We pass the test only when we respond with understanding, patience, compassion, love, and forgiveness. Jesus reminds us that even the ungodly love those who love them, but when we love those who treat us badly, we are children of God.

Luke 6:35 love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

This is another test that we regularly fail as we become angry and impatient with other people. Good thing for us that God doesn't test our faith just once. He allows us to retake the test over and over and over again. The point isn't to get 100%. The point is to grow in faith.

I went back and read through the account of Abraham. There are thirteen different accounts of Abraham's faith being tested.

If we judge those tests on the basis of "did Abraham trust the Lord" his grade isn't so good. Of those thirteen attempts, Abraham passed six times. That's only 46% on his test, and yet that is a good score. Daniel might have a better score than that but he is probably the only one. We certainly don't do any better than Abraham.

If, however, we judge those tests on the basis of "did the Lord reassure Abraham that his sins were forgiven and through that reassurance strengthen his faith afterwards," then the score is 100%. There is no failure with God's test because either way God reassures us of his grace.

We are tempted every day. We fail often but God always reassures us that we are forgiven and teaches us to trust in Him.

We are tempted by the Devil

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Satan wants nothing more than to get us to doubt either God's very existence or his love for us. If he can get us to doubt the truth that Jesus loves us and has forgiven us, he can lead us wherever he likes like a dog following the scent of meat.

However, God limits the time of Satan's temptations and not in a bad way but in a good way. Normally when a teacher says you only have this much time to complete the test that is a bad thing. However, with God it is a comfort to know we will not have to endure temptation forever.

Jesus was in the wilderness forty days and then the devil left.

Noah endured the rain and the storm for 40 days then the clouds parted.

The Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years, then they entered the promised land.

David was hunted by Saul but only for a time and then God brought it to an end.

Whatever test or temptation we are enduring it will not last forever. God's word tells us that Satan's time is short.

In revelation chapter 13 the Devil is granted great power to do terrible things on earth

Revelation 13:15 15 He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

But in Revelation 14:1 Satan's time comes to an end and the Lamb reigns forever.

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

The time of the dragon and of devastation, the time of sin and temptation, the time of evil will come to an end. What a blessing to know in the midst of great difficulty that it will not go on forever.

There is a time limit on God's tests.

This is how God writes his test. You know all the answers because every answer is Jesus. You cannot fail because God has promised you, his forgiveness. And finally take courage and be strengthened in the knowledge that the test is timed. It will last only for so long. God allowed Satan to test Job but only for a time. So too your testing will come to an end. Perhaps soon, certainly in the end when the same glory that we saw last week on the mountain is revealed again for all to see.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Amen