

## OVERCOMING TEMPTATIONS

An Article by  
Pastor Kemi Ilori  
Living Hope Church  
LEEDS

[pastorkemi@livinghopechurch.co.uk](mailto:pastorkemi@livinghopechurch.co.uk)

The following is an extract from The Oxford Companion to the Bible (edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D Coogan, published in 1993):

In biblical traditions, temptation is generally a test or trial to which the tempter subjects a person, often by confusing what is good with what is evil. Along with strength of will, the capacity to discern good is being tested, and the tester is usually the God of Israel or occasionally the adversary, Satan. Less frequent is the understanding of temptation as the conscious desire of individuals to do what they know to be wrong, though this does occur. (Galatians 6:1; James 1:14)

In the Hebrew Bible, the most famous example of God's setting a specific trail for an individual is the testing of Abraham (Genesis 22). Another is God's permission to Satan to put Job to the test (Job 1:6-12). In the New Testament, God is likewise the ultimate initiator of the temptation of Jesus, for it is the Spirit that drove Jesus into the wilderness, where Satan's offers would serve as a maximum test of Jesus' discernment and courage. (Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11). Similarly, God is pictured as setting tests for Jesus' followers (Luke 22:28; James 1:2; 1Peter 1:6).

The Bible also speaks of putting God to the test. Israel presumes that because God has delivered it from earlier crises, He will do so again (Exodus 17:2-7; Numbers 14:20-25; Deuteronomy 6:16; Psalm 78:18; Psalm 95:9). Evildoers challenge God to punish them but they escape unscathed (Malachi 3:15). The same language is used in the New Testament, where Jesus refuses to test God (Matthew 4:7; Matthew 26:53); Christians may test Him by their improper conduct (Acts 5:9; Acts 15:10; 1Corinthians 10:9).

A larger role is assigned to Satan in the New Testament than in the Hebrew Bible. God uses Satan to tempt people; Satan uses them to tempt God. The afflictions believers suffered because of their faith were often understood as an opportunity for the tempter (Mark 4:14-17; 1Thessalonians 3:4-5). This provides a background for understanding the climactic petitions designed by Jesus for His followers as they faced persecutions (Matthew 6:13). These petitions can be understood as asking, "Father ... do not bring us to the time of trial by the Evil One, but rescue us from his power". It was because Jesus had also been tempted that He was able to help those who struggling against the same foe (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15) *Contributed by Paul S. Minear*

---

### Temptation

The basic meaning of temptation has nothing really to do with testing or trial – amongst other meanings, "temptation" means "Lure", "Enticement", "Pull", "Inducement", "Attraction", "Persuasion", "Appeal", "Excitement". Sometimes, theologians forget these various meanings and build complex interpretations on selective Bible stories of God's relationship with His people. In the Old Testament as much as in the New Testament, the idea of God setting traps for His people in order to make them sin is not a teaching of the Bible. It is the fanciful imagination of carnal theologians. James puts it very well when he writes as follows: (James 1:13-18) "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is

tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

In spite of this, it is difficult sometimes to ignore Scriptures which hint of God’s role when His people are tempted. The Lord’s Prayer contains the famous verse: “Lead us not into temptation”. Another famous verse relates to the Holy Spirit directing the Lord Jesus into the wilderness as if purposely to be tempted of the devil. In the Old Testament, there is the famous example of the census carried out by David. Was he tempted by God or by Satan? **2Samuel 24:1** – “Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

**1Chronicles 21:1** – “Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”) Jesus Christ Himself was tempted in all things but He did not sin. Mostly, it is assumed that He was tempted by Satan.

**Luke 4:13** – “Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.”

**Hebrews 2:18** - “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

**Hebrews 4:15** – “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”)

The other difficulty we have is how to separate temptation from testing. And to make things a little bit more difficult, testing is also used sometimes in Scripture to mean “trial”. Trial is an adversity that befalls the believer despite his or her faithfulness to God, or his or her prayers to ward it off.

**1Corinthians 10:13** – “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

**James 1:2-4, 12** – “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.... 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.”

**1Peter 4:12** – “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...”

In short, generally, God does allow His people to experience temptation. His Holy Spirit may play a part in directing His people into specific locations or situations where some temptation or testing is waiting for them. This happens because God wants to prove the faith of His people, not because He wants to wreck their faith. But neither God, nor His Holy Spirit is responsible for the evil actions or choices that people make when they succumb to temptation. Their actions only prove a point: the depth of their obedience to God and their willingness to stick to His standards in the face of a test.

More specifically, temptation comes from two sources: (1) From Satan, if God allows him to do this, the story of Job is a good example. (Job 1:1-12; 1Peter 5:8) (2) From the heart – the heart

represents the seat of our thoughts and feelings; the “heart” is also often used to mean our mind as well. Our mind is the place where we make choices and our will power is based here.

**Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

**Matthew 12:35** - "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things."

**Matthew 15:18-19** - "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.") No wonder, David prayed for a new heart (Psalm 51:10), and God's new covenant is to create in us a new heart.

**Ezekiel 18:31** - "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

**Ezekiel 36:26** - "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

### **What can we do to overcome temptations?**

1. Know the Lord
2. Know the Enemy
3. Know Yourself