



Geography of Salvation

Preaching the Map

A Bible Study with Stan Key

TESTING GOD

Exodus 17:1-7

- I. The tests at University of the Desert (Exodus 15:22-18:27).
- A. God redeemed his people and then led them into the desert because they needed an **education** (Deut. 8:2). There, at Desert U, he “**tested**” (Hebrew, *nacah*) them with five different exams:
1. The lack of **water** (Ex. 15:22-27. See v. 25). Thirst Quenching 101.
 2. The lack of **food** (Ex. 16:1-36. See v. 4). Nutrition 101.
 3. The lack of **water** (Ex. 17:1-7). Thirst Quenching 102.
 4. An **enemy attack** (Amalekites) (Ex. 17:8-16). Spiritual Warfare 101.
 5. Administrative overload and **burnout** (Ex. 18:1-27). Gifts of the Spirit 101.
- B. Although God does not **tempt** his people (see James 1:13) he certainly tests them (see Gen. 22:1; II Chron. 32:31; Ps. 105:19; John 6:6; etc.). These tests are usually **painful**. But *why* would a loving God lead his people to be tested?
1. To **reveal** what is in their hearts (Deut. 8:2)
 2. To **humble** them (Deut. 8:2,16).
 3. To **equip** them for the battles ahead (Judg. 3:1-2).
 4. To produce **endurance** (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3).
 5. To bring about **holiness** of character (Heb. 12:7-11).
 6. _____
 7. _____
 8. _____
- C. At Rephidim (Ex. 17:1) God has planned another test for his people but this produces a negative reaction and the students push back. When God tests his people it is a good thing but when the people **test God**... not good! The education program at Desert U is becoming filled with conflict and **bad attitudes**.
- II. Nothing to Drink... Again!
- A. This is not the first time they've had no water (see Ex. 15:22-27)! In other words, God is giving them a **retest**. When a teacher gives a retest you can be sure that the material is of **vital importance**. This lesson *must* be mastered! Unless we pass this course on Thirst Quenching, we will never reach our inheritance in Canaan. We will die in the desert.
1. The test at Rephidim (Massah) is similar enough to the test at Marah that the people should have easily passed this test. Alas, they **failed** again. Question: How *should* the people have responded?

2. How did the people respond?
 - a. They **quarreled** with Moses and wanted to stone him.
 - b. They **grumbled**. “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us with thirst?”
 - c. They **tested the Lord**. “Is the Lord with us or not?”
- B. Almost 40 years later there will be yet a **third** no-water test (Num. 20:2–13). A new generation has arisen and God wants to teach them the Thirst Quenching lesson. But like their parents, they too fail the test. But Moses fails the test too... big time! God tells Moses to take his staff but rather than striking the rock, he tells him to **speak** to the rock.

*Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall **we** bring water for you out of this rock?” And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff **twice**, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not **believe in me**, to uphold me as **holy** in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” These are the waters of Meribah.... (Num. 20:10–13)*

	Marah The Bitter Place Exodus 15:22–27	Massah The Testing Place Exodus 17:1–7	Meribah The Quarreling Place Numbers 20:2–13
The Sin	Grumbling	Grumbling, quarreling and testing God: “Is God with us or not?”	Quarreling: “Why have you made us leave Egypt to come to this evil place?”
The Solution	A tree to throw in the bitter water	Take your staff and strike the rock (see I Cor. 10:4)	Take your staff and speak to the rock
The Conclusion	If you listen to God and obey his voice, he will not put on you the diseases he put on the Egyptians.	Do not put the Lord to the test	Trust in the Lord and uphold his holiness

III. Testing the Tester

- A. Think back to when you were a student in school. What are some of the ways students tested their teachers?

How do you think this made the teacher feel?

- B. Most teaching Exodus 17:1–7 emphasizes how God can provide **water** in a desert place and how Jesus is the fulfillment of that glorious reality (John 4:10–14; 7:37–39; I Cor. 10:4). This is true, of course, but the **primary focus** of the text and the context is on how the people are **testing God** (vv. 2, 7). These people have seen God do amazing things (10 plagues, part the Red Sea, send manna, etc.) and yet they continue to doubt his ability to take care of them.
- “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” (Deut. 6:16)
 - “At Taberah also, and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you **provoked** the Lord to wrath.” (Deut. 9:22)
 - “Today, if you hear his voice, do not **harden your hearts** as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.” (Ps. 95:7–9)
 - “The devil took Jesus... and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you; on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, ‘Again, it is written, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test”’” (Matt. 4:5–7; Jesus is quoting Deut. 6:16, which is referring to Ex. 17:1–7).
- C. Thus we begin to see what it means to test God.
- To **whine** and complain how he is providing for us.
 - To demand that God prove himself to us and perform on command.
 - To push God and test his **patience**.
 - To keep failing over and over again the same test that he gives us.
 - To become bitter, cynical and full of **unbelief** in spite of all the evidence of his goodness and faithfulness.
 - To forget God’s track record and become controlled by our doubts and fears.
 - To not uphold the **holiness** of God.

IV. Four Tragic Ways We Can Test God

A. Massah. (Exodus 17:1–7)

There is no water. But rather than trust once again in the One who had provided water only a few weeks earlier, the One who had parted the Red Sea, provided manna, and sent the 10 plagues, they grumble and ask “Is the Lord among us or not?”.

Testing God means: doubting his **presence**.

B. Kadesh-Barnea. (Numbers 13–14)

After about two years of travel, the people arrive at the border of Canaan. “Go up and possess your inheritance,” God tells them. “No,” say the people, “there are giants over there!” God is upset and decides to let the whole generation die in the desert. “None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these **ten** times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give them” (Num. 14:22–23; see Heb. 3:9).

Testing God means: willful **disobedience** to a clear command.

C. Snakes! (Numbers 21:4–9)

Toward the end of the desert journey, the people become impatient and complain once again. “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this **worthless** food (manna).” (Num. 21:5). In response to their attitude, God sends poisonous snakes among them and many die. Referring to this incident, Paul says, “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents” (I Cor. 10:9).

Testing God means: Complaining about his care and provision and feeling **I deserve better than this!**

D. Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1–11)

When many were giving generous offerings in the early church, Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give *all* the proceeds from the sale of a piece of land to the apostles. But they had secretly kept back some for themselves. For them it was more important to **appear** holy than to *be* holy. They were both struck dead as Peter explained: “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9).

Testing God means: **pretending** to be what I’m not; image is everything.

V. One Good Way to Test God

Though a different Hebrew word is used, the prophet Malachi reminds us that it is possible to test God in a good way... a very good way.

*“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. **Test me** (Hebrew, *bachan*) in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (Malachi 3:10 NIV)*

God is inviting Israel (and us) to take the risk of faith and to give him **the opportunity** to prove how faithful and righteous he really is. If only the rich young ruler had tested Jesus in this way!

TABLE TALK

1. Can you remember a situation when you were in school when the students tested a teacher? Describe this.
2. What is the difference between testing God in a good way (Malachi 3:10) and testing God in a bad way?
3. In Numbers 20:2–13, why do you think Moses struck the rock rather than speak to it? Why was God’s punishment so severe?
4. Is there an area in your life where you continually fail, a besetting sin, perhaps? Is this an example of God giving you a retest? Will this study change the way you respond in the future?
5. The lesson mentioned four ways that we can be guilty of testing God: doubting his presence, willful disobedience, complaining about his care and provision, and pretending to be what I’m not. With which of these do you struggle most?
6. Is there some specific area where God is inviting you to test him (in a good way), to give him the opportunity to show how faithful he really is?

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

By William Williams (1745)

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.*

*Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.*

*Lord, I trust Thy mighty power,
Wondrous are Thy works of old;
Thou deliver'st Thine from thralldom,
Who for naught themselves had sold:
Thou didst conquer, Thou didst conquer,
Sin, and Satan and the grave,
Sin, and Satan and the grave.*

*When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.*

*Musing on my habitation,
Musing on my heav'nly home,
Fills my soul with holy longings:
Come, my Jesus, quickly come;
Vanity is all I see;
Lord, I long to be with Thee!
Lord, I long to be with Thee!*