

TRIALS ARE NOT GOD'S TESTS

- A. Introduction: To walk in victory you must know how to respond rather than react to the challenges of life.
1. When you respond to your situation, you answer it by praising or acknowledging God -- by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. James 1:2,3; Ps 107:8,15,21,31; Ps 50:23
 - a. You cannot do that if you do not have accurate knowledge of what God is like and how He works.
 1. What is God like? Jesus shows us He is good (good means good). John 14:9,10; Acts 10:38
 2. How does God work? He takes the evil in this world and brings good out of it Rom 8:28
 - b. To respond, you need answers to these questions: Why is this happening? What is God doing?
 1. Why is this happening? Troubles are part of life in a sin cursed earth. (Rom 5:12; Gen 3:17-19; Matt 6:19; etc.). God is never the source or cause of your troubles.
 2. What is God doing? Many people would answer that question this way: God is testing us with these troubles. That is an inaccurate answer. Trials are not God's tests.
 2. The Old Testament is filled with examples of how God works in people's lives. Those accounts were written to encourage us and give us hope. Rom 15:4
 - a. In these accounts there are no examples of God orchestrating circumstances to teach or test people.
 - b. Instead, we find examples of God using the hardships that in this world because of sin and causing them to serve His purposes as He brings good out of bad.
- B. It is a common idea among Christians that God tests us with trials to see what we'll do. But, why would God, who knows everything, need to test us to find out what we're going to do. He already knows!
1. That idea comes from looking at our circumstances and then trying to figure out what God is doing.
 - a. You cannot tell what God is doing by looking at circumstances. He tells us to walk by faith, not sight (II Cor 5:7). If He then imparts information to us through "sight" we aren't walking by faith.
 - b. God does not impart information to us through circumstances. He speaks to us through the Bible.
 - c. The phrase "God is testing us" is similar to the phrase "God allows". Both are loaded with meanings that go way beyond what the Bible teaches. We probably would do well to eliminate both phrases from our vocabulary.
 2. The Bible does give examples of God proving or testing His people, but the "test" is always God's word and not a difficult circumstance.
 - a. In John 6:6 Jesus proved or tested His disciples with His word. Remember, Jesus shows us the kinds of things God does. Jesus said He only did what He saw His Father do. John 5:19
 1. A large crowd had followed Jesus (five thousand men, plus women and children). Jesus asked His disciples where they would get food to feed everyone. He said this to test them.
 2. Jesus did not create the lack. Rather He asked them a question in the midst of their lack.
 - b. Jesus' test was not the circumstance but His word in the circumstance. Would they believe His words to them despite what they could see and feel?
 1. By this point in His ministry Jesus has already taught extensively about a Heavenly Father who loves and cares for His people and will meet the material needs of those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:25-33).
 2. This was an opportunity for the disciples to respond by acknowledging God: We don't have enough food and don't know what to do. But our Father cares for us and will meet this need.
 3. God tested Abraham. Gen 22:1--After these events, God tested and proved Abraham (Amp). If we keep reading we learn that God told Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice.
 - a. Note, God did not take Isaac from Abraham to see what Abraham would do. That's how many people believe God tests His people. God's test to Abraham was His word: Will you obey me?
 1. God did not "need to test" Abraham. God is omniscient and knew what he would do. Based on the fact that God is good and good means good, we can assume that Abraham was

benefited by this opportunity to demonstrate his faith through obeying God's word to him.

2. The New Testament tells us Abraham was so certain that Isaac was the son God had promised him, he knew, even if Isaac died, God would bring him back to life. Heb 11:19
- b. Also, many events and people in the Old Testament picture and foreshadow Jesus and His work on the Cross. Abraham's sacrifice of his only son was such a case. Consider these points.
 1. Heb 11:19--He reasoned that God was able to raise from the dead, and so he received Isaac back as a symbol (New American Bible). A symbol of what? The coming resurrection of the dead of which Jesus was the firstfruits (I Cor 15:20,21).
 2. When Abraham told Isaac they were going to make a sacrifice, Isaac asked him where they would get a lamb to kill. Abraham said: God will provide an offering (Gen 22:8). God did provide them with a sacrifice that day, but Abraham was also speaking prophetically of the coming of Jesus, God's only son, whom God would give to be a sacrifice for the sins of men.
4. If your only source of information about how God tests people was the Bible, you'd never conclude He tests people by orchestrating circumstances. Consider these examples of God "testing" His people.
 - a. Ps 105:17-19 says God tested Joseph with His word. God promised Joseph greatness, but that promise seemed thwarted when His brothers sold him into slavery. God's test was not the many afflictive circumstances Joseph endured, but rather: Would Joseph continue to believe God's promise of greatness, despite how things looked and felt?
 - b. God tested the generation of Hebrew people whom He brought out of bondage in Egypt with His word. Ex 15:25--And issued this challenge to them (Knox); Ex 16:4--And I will test them in this, to see whether they will follow my instructions or not. (Living Bible)
 - c. Note, God's test was not the circumstance, but rather His word in the circumstance. And, the test is always the same: Will you believe and obey my word despite what you see and feel?

C. Let's look at these principles by which God works in action in the lives of His people in the Old Testament.

1. Jacob, his sons, and their families (Israel) went down to Egypt when Joseph was second in command, where they prospered greatly. As Israel grew and thrived, and Joseph's generation died off, Egypt reacted to Israel with fear and jealousy, enslaving them. Ex 1:1-14
 - a. Why did God's chosen people fall into slavery? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. Their condition in slavery is called affliction, oppression, and bondage (Ex 1:12,14; Ex 3:9). The Bible identifies Satan as the source of all those things (I Pet 5:8,9; Acts 10:38; Luke 13:16).
 1. But, the more Israel was oppressed, the more they grew. Pharaoh ordered Hebrew midwives and his own people to destroy Hebrew baby boys. Yet, the Hebrews multiplied. Ex 1:15-22
 2. Why? Because God can cause you to prosper even in very difficult circumstances. Gen 39:23
 - b. When Moses was born, his parents hid him for three months to keep him from being killed, and then put him in a boat in the Nile River. They responded by trusting God. Ex 2:1-4; Heb 11:23
 1. Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and adopted him. Moses' mother was paid to nurse him and take care of him for a time before she turned him over to Pharaoh's daughter. Not only did Moses survive, but he had a godly influence in his early years. Ex 2:5-10
 2. God brought genuine good out of genuine bad. The very thing that was working to destroy the Hebrew boys, Egypt, was the very thing God used to save Moses' life. And, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses received training he would not have gotten had he grown up among the Hebrews as a brick-making slave. Acts 7:22
2. As an adult, Moses was drawn to his people. But, he killed an Egyptian, fled Egypt, and spent forty years in the deserts of Midian. God didn't cause Moses to kill the Egyptian, but He used it. Ex 2:11-22
 - a. The very rashness of Moses' act showed he was not yet ready to lead a group of difficult people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. It would take time for the character traits to develop which will make him a great leader.

- b. Moses ended up in the desert where he learned how to live in a desert, the very training he needed to fulfill God's plan for his life -- lead people across a desert wilderness. Ex 3:1
3. Moses eventually returned to Egypt and God used him to lead Israel out of bondage, back to Canaan.
 - a. Once Pharaoh released Israel to return home, Ex 13:17,18 says there were two routes by which God could take them to the Promised Land -- the way of the Philistines which was populated with a warlike tribe of idol worshippers and the wilderness route through the Sinai Peninsula which was dry and mountainous. Mount Sinai is 7,400 feet. Rainfall ranges from one to eight inches a year.
 - b. A journey along either route would be difficult. Why? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth.
 1. Warlike idol worshippers are here because of Adam's sin which produced a sin nature in man. Gen 4:1-9; Rom 5:19; Eph 2:1-3
 2. Desert places and the oppositions they present --heat, lack of food, water, snakes, scorpions, etc.-- are here because of Adam's sin. Before sin, there were no desert places. Gen 2:6
 - c. Although the way was rough, God took them the best way. God did not set up the challenging circumstances. But, He knew which route would produce maximum results.
 1. God knew His people were not ready to fight the Philistines. They needed time to develop.
 2. God saw a way to use the wilderness route to destroy Egypt so that they would not be a constant source of trouble for Israel once Israel was in the Promised Land. Ex 14:3,4
 3. Deut 1:33--God led them ... and had selected the best places for them to camp. (Living Bible)
4. Three days away from Egypt, and out of water, Israel came to the bitter waters of Marah. Ex 15:22-26
 - a. Why wasn't sweet water waiting for them? That's life in a sin cursed earth. God didn't create, cause, or "allow" the situation. However, it was an opportunity for Israel to practice trusting God.
 1. Israel could have responded to their situation with: "We need water and don't know how we are going to get it. But, we're not worried. God will provide for us!"
 2. In other words, it was a chance for them to exercise their faith. Faith has to be exercised to grow strong. The only time you can exercise faith for anything is when you cannot see it.
 - b. This is the first place God "tested" His people. At Marah God said: If you listen to me and obey, I will be your healer. In Ex 16:4, God again "tests" them: Take only the manna you need for today.
 1. God is not testing them because He doesn't know what they'll do. He's giving them an opportunity to express their faith in Him through obedience -- and thereby strengthen it.
 2. When God "tested" His people they always knew exactly what the test was and how to pass it. God's test was never a circumstance where no one could figure out what God was doing.
 - c. Trials and hardships expose character flaws in us. That is one way God uses the troubles of life.
 1. Israel's trial, no good water, brought an ugly, deadly trait to the surface -- complaining.
 2. This would have been a good time for Israel deal with it and correct it because complaining is the voice of unbelief. Unbelief will cost Israel the Promised Land. Heb 3:19
5. The trip through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land was about a two week journey. Yet, it took Israel two years to make the trip (Deut 1:2; Num 10:11-13). But God has perfect timing.
 - a. Two years for a two week trip may seem too long, but God was at work. Much good happened -- events of potential great value to Israel. Israel could have rested in that fact.
 1. They had opportunities to trust God for food, water, direction, protection, and healing, which would help develop their faith and prepare them for the challenges in the Promised Land.
 2. God also used the time to meet with Moses on the mountain and give him the law by which they would live once in the land, as well as instructions for building the tabernacle.
 3. During their "waiting period", a fear of Israel and their God was developing in Canaan. This would help pave the way for Israel's victory once in the land. Josh 2:9-11
 - b. When Israel finally entered the land, it was inhabited by people serving Satan, people who were a source of many trials and much trouble for Israel. Why? That's just life in a sin cursed earth.
 1. Why didn't God drive them out at once through a miracle that so Israel didn't have to fight?
 2. Because He wanted people like Rahab to be saved. Because it was best for Israel. There

weren't enough Israelites yet to keep the land from being overrun by wild animals. Deut 7:22

- D. We don't realize that so much of what we believe about God and how He works in our lives has no basis in scripture. We believe and repeat clichés that are based, not on the Bible, but on religious tradition.
1. When trials come our way we react with statements like this: God has me in the wilderness because He has a purpose known only to Him, or, He's got me in the fiery furnace to refine me and purify me.
 - a. God did not lead Israel into the wilderness. The wilderness was not God's will for Israel. His will for them was that they enter the Promised Land -- which they refused to do. Num 13:31-Num 14:5
 1. Israel was in the wilderness because of their refusal to obey God and enter the land.
 2. If the wilderness was God's way of testing or purifying His people, it failed and they all flunked the test because all of them (except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb) died in the wilderness. The test, the purifying experience, killed them.
 - b. The Bible does refer to people being in a fiery furnace, but not because God is purifying them.
 1. God called Israel's experience in Egypt where they were enslaved an iron furnace. Deut 4:20 --Out of Egypt, that iron blast furnace (Torah); I Kings 8:51; Jer 11:4
 2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace because of persecution. They refused to bow down to an idol. Dan 3
 2. The Old Testament has references to God refining His people (another lesson!). Consider these points.
 - a. The word most often translated refine describes the purifying process of a refiner who heats metal, takes away the dross, and is left with a pure substance. The emphasis is not on the process itself (being "fried or tried in the fire") but on the end result -- purification.
 1. The word is used in connection with Israel during their periods of rebellion and idol worship. The idea is not, "God's gonna fry you!", but rather they are words of hope: Israel, you won't always be like this. One day God is going to purify you so that you never again abandon Him.
 2. Mal 3:1-3 compares Messiah's coming to that of a refiner. Jesus, through the Cross which made possible the new birth, will purify (not "fry, test, refine") His people.
 3. It is an inward purification accomplished by the Spirit of God. Trials (outward) don't purify people inwardly any more than water baptism (outward) washes away sins.
 - b. Ps 105:19 says the word of the Lord tried Joseph. Tried is the same word as refine in the Hebrew.
 1. That agrees with John 15:1-3. Purge (v2) and clean (v3) are the same words in the Greek.
 2. God purges, cleanses, purifies, and refines His people by His word working in them.
- E. Conclusion: God does not orchestrate circumstances to test people. God's test is His word in the circumstance. Will you believe and obey Him despite what you see and feel?
1. We've looked at examples of God's dealings with people in the Bible, and, we see that, although God does not cause the hardships of life or the poor choices men make, He can use them. He can cause afflictive circumstances to serve His purposes as He brings great good out of them.
 2. Accurate knowledge of how God works -- according to the Bible -- will help us respond rather than react to the hardships of life.