

Deuteronomy 6:16-19
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“You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah [Ex 17:1-7].¹⁷ “You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you [תצו *tsavah* – *to give an order, command* – Piel verb stem].¹⁸ “You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD [in agreement with His commands], that it may be well with you [i.e., God will reward their obedience] and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to *give* your fathers,¹⁹ by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken.”

Summary:

Moses previously explained that Israel was about to experience the test of prosperity, as God was about to bring His people into the Promised Land and give them homes, wells, and vineyards which had been built by others (Deut 6:10-11). Moses was concerned the prosperity would lead to amnesia and Israel would forget the Lord’s deliverance from Egypt and slavery (Deut 6:12), and he commanded them to stay faithful to God and worship Him only (Deut 6:13). Israel was not to engage in idolatry, as the pagans around them did (Deut 6:14), for Yahweh is a jealous God, who zealously seeks to protect His relationship with His people, and will become angry and render punishment if they violate the covenant (Deut 6:15). Now, Moses hearkens back to an event that occurred shortly after the exodus, saying, “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah” (Deut 6:16). The event Moses referred to occurred with the exodus generation nearly forty years earlier, in which Israel tested the Lord so that He might prove Himself to them (Ex 17:1-7). This was not necessary, as they’d personally witnessed His deliverance from Egypt and had benefitted from His provision as He led them into the wilderness. Warren Wiersbe writes:

After He delivered Israel from Egypt, the Lord deliberately led them through difficulties so He could teach them to trust Him. First, they came to bitter water at Marah and complained about it instead of asking God to help them (15:22–26). Then they got hungry for the “fleshpots of Egypt” and murmured against the Lord and the Lord provided the daily manna to sustain them (16:1–8). When they came to Rephidim, there was no water to drink, and once again they complained against the Lord instead of trusting the Lord (17:1–7). “Is the

Lord among us or not?” was their question, meaning, “If He is among us, why doesn’t He do something?”¹

Eugene Merrill adds:

To test God is to make upon him demands or requirements that are inappropriate either to his nature and character or to the circumstances. Jesus quoted this text in responding to Satan’s overtures that he cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12). The point is not that God could not have rescued him but that such an act would trivialize the power of God and his care for those he loves.²

God, because He is gracious and kind, gave them water from the rock (Ex 17:6), even though they complained against the Lord (Ex 17:7). Unlike their parents who demonstrated unbelief by complaining against God, Moses called for the second generation to live by faith and obey the Lord, saying, “You should diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you” (Deut 6:17). What God had commanded (Heb. *צַוָּה* *tsavah*) them was within their ability to do, and would bring blessing if they complied (cf. Deut 11:26-28). Here, in clear terms, Moses states that keeping God’s commandments means doing “what is right in the sight of the LORD” (Deut 6:18a). It must always be remembered that Israel was a theocracy and God was their Ruler, Lawgiver, and Judge (see Isa 33:22). The Lord had liberated His people from Egyptian slavery and offered them a covenant relationship which they accepted (Ex 19:1-9), which bound them in a relationship with Him. As their good King, God had every right to issue commands and direct their lives; not because He was a brutal tyrant who sought to subjugate and oppress them, but rather, that they might walk with Him and be blessed. If Israel would walk with the Lord and follow His commands, the result would be, “that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to *give* your fathers” (Deut 6:18b). Obedience would result in blessing. If Israel would follow the Lord, He would keep His word “by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken” (Deut 6:19). God owned the land (Lev 25:23; Psa 85:1; Hos 9:3; Joel 2:18), and He would transfer ownership from one people to the next as He willed.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 49.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 172.

For the Christian, God gives us commands to guide our lives, which commands are consistent with His good character and when followed, guide us into right living which glorifies Him, benefits others, and helps us avoid the unnecessary suffering that results from bad decisions. And, like Israel, God will give us tests to help develop our relationship with Him and to reveal what is in our hearts that we might grow spiritually. Like Agur, we should seek neither poverty nor riches, lest we turn away from the Lord (Pro 30:7-9), and we should learn to be thankful, whatever our condition in life (Phi 4:11-13). It is generally true that most believers turn to the Lord in times of adversity, but fail to walk with God when prosperity comes; which might explain the failure of many Christians who live in America. Warren Wiersbe states:

The Lord tests our faith, not just in the great crises of life, but even more in the small unexpected events, such as a travel delay, an irritating interruption, a sudden sickness, or a lost wallet. The way we respond in these situations will indicate what's in our hearts, because what life does to us depends on what life finds in us. If we love and trust the Lord, we'll leave the matter with Him and do what He tells us; but if we question the Lord and rebel because we're not getting our own way, then we're in danger of tempting Him. One of the best protections against tempting the Lord is a grateful heart. If we're in the habit of thanking the Lord in everything, including the painful experiences of life, then the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with love and praise instead of Satan filling us with bitter venom. How many "Massahs" and "Meribahs" are marked on the map of our journey of faith?³

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, "Be" Commentary Series, 49–50.