

DAY THIRTY-ONE

“TESTING GOD”

PSALM 78:17-31

As you begin to break down Psalm 78, you can discern that the text has some overall objectives. It is trying to communicate a summary history of Ancient Israel, covering the period from the Exodus from Egypt to the wilderness sojourn to the establishment of David’s reign in Jerusalem. The insolence of the Israelites was so disturbing to consider, that I was a little appalled to think that these were *my predecessors* in the faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1).¹ Yet, as I pondered their frequent disobedience and obstinance toward the Lord, I was reminded that human attitudes and actions today are not any better. Sadly, the propensity for people to test or tempt God, prevails especially in the ranks of many religious people. Fallen humanity’s innate ungratefulness is the same in *any generation*. But before commenting on these realities, please consider offering up some praises of thanksgiving for who our gracious Heavenly Father is—and His provision for you:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 78:17-31

Yet they still continued to sin against Him, to rebel against the Most High in the desert. And in their heart they put God to the test by asking food according to their desire. Then they spoke against God; they said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, and streams were overflowing; can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?” Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath; and a fire was kindled against Jacob and anger also mounted against Israel, because they did not believe in God and did not trust in His

¹ “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1, NRSV).

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salvation. Yet He commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven; He rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them food from heaven. Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in abundance. He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens and by His power He directed the south wind. When He rained meat upon them like the dust, even winged fowl like the sand of the seas, then He let *them* fall in the midst of their camp, round about their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, and their desire He gave to them. Before they had satisfied their desire, while their food was in their mouths, the anger of God rose against them and killed some of their stoutest ones, and subdued the choice men of Israel.

If you can simply imagine what Israel had directly witnessed, as the people were delivered from the slavery and bondage of Egypt, you have to wonder just why they could turn around, and in short order: question, complain, sin, and test or tempt God. As our Psalm selection for today describes: **“And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust”** (Psalm 78:18a, KJV).

Our Psalm selection for today, Psalm 78:17-31, and other testimonies encountered in both the Torah and Tanakh, indicate that God’s people throughout history have *tested or tempted Him*. The caustic reminder of how Ancient Israel often interacted with their all-powerful God who delivered them from servitude, is quite sobering to contemplate. Even though Israel had witnessed disastrous plagues and great humiliation dispensed upon Egypt, and a dramatic and miraculous intervention via the parting of the Red Sea—not to mention water gushing forth from split rocks, or a constant reminder of the Lord’s presence in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—they still had a proclivity to test God. *Why?*

The Apostle Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now these things happened to them as a warning², but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (RSV). One of the main reasons why we plainly study the Torah and Tanakh as Messianic Believers is not just to understand the Father’s plan of salvation history, and enrich our understanding of the Apostolic Scriptures. We study these texts to not repeat the mistakes of our spiritual forbearers! The Message offers us a very good paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:11:

“These are all warning markers—DANGER!—in our history books, written down so that we don’t repeat their mistakes. Our positions in the story are parallel—they at the beginning, we at the end—and we are just as capable of messing it up as they were.”³

Do we ever test God? Do we ever find ourselves not accomplishing His will?

If you look at a few of the times in the Tanakh where the Hebrew verb *nasah* (נָסָה) is used,⁴ you may see something that really stands out at you—as it really bore witness with me, in terms of being a parent. The majority of the thirty-six times where *nasah* is seen,⁵

² Grk. *typhikōs* (τυπικῶς); “as an example/ warning” (Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 1019).

³ For further consideration, consult the author’s article “The Rules of Engagement,” appearing in the November 2010 issue of Outreach Israel News.

⁴ In Psalm 78:18, *nasah* appears in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), and means “to put someone to the test,” specifically how “men **tempt**’ God” (*CHALOT*, 239).

⁵ This figure was determined using a lemma search of the Hebrew Tanakh (WTT) in BibleWorks 7.0.

appear in relation to God testing His people. The first usage of *nasah* appears where Abraham is given the greatest test of his life, concerning God's request that he sacrifice his son Isaac:

"Now it came about after these things, that God tested [*nasah*, Piel] Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you'" (Genesis 22:1-2).

Abraham was commanded to offer up Isaac on Mount Moriah, something that definitely foreshadows Yeshua being offered up for us (cf. Hebrews 11:19).

Next, we see how the Lord tested Ancient Israel at the bitter waters of Marah, where He states how they will be healed from all of their diseases if they obey Him:

"Then he [Moses] cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there **He tested** [*nasah*, Piel] them. And He said, 'If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer'" (Exodus 15:25-26).

The pattern of God testing His people continues when the gift of manna is used by Him, to see if His people will be obedient:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may **test** [*nasah*, Piel] them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction'" (Exodus 16:4).

We also see *nasah* used when Israel tests or tempts God:

"Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water that we may drink.' And Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you **test** [*nasah*, Piel] the LORD?' But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, 'Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, 'What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.' Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they **tested** [*nasah*, Piel] the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us, or not?'" (Exodus 17:2-7).

At this beginning point in the Israelites' wilderness journey, Moses innately knew that it was not at all appropriate or worthwhile for the people to test God. Even though the Lord took care of Israel's immediate needs through the provision of water by Moses striking the rock at Horeb, He was not pleased with the quarrelsome and demanding nature of those testing Him. *He was not delighted with the largely ungrateful attitude expressed by His people.* As a consequence, it is understandable that within short order of this testing, the Amalekites are released to chastise Israel (Exodus 17:9-16). Were it not for the mercy of the Almighty, and some of the additional actions of Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua's military leadership, the punishment could have been far greater.

Are you beginning to see a pattern emerge? If you are a parent, perhaps you will be able to identify with what happens when God's people have tested or tempted Him in the past. Have you ever had a child test you? Do you remember how you first felt when you realized

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what he or she was doing? You probably were perplexed with what took place, but because you loved your child you might have sloughed it off as an aberration. You may have simply handled the request, demand, or test by just taking care of the need.

But do you remember how you reacted when the child put you to the test *the next time*? At this following encounter you may have had the previous experience to rely upon, and perhaps you did not react to the second test the same as you did as the first. In fact, if you discerned that the child had previously manipulated you in order to get his or her way, you might have reacted to the test with some conditions. If you begin to think through all of the testing that you might have received—or on the flip side, some of the testing you might have put your own parents through—you might begin to see how God responds to our actions very much like a loving, albeit stern, parent.

In time, if a child continues in his or her abrasive and demanding ways, the parent may decide that it is best for the long term health, maturity, and benefit of the child that correction be issued for obstinate behavior. Only through the trials of life do some decide to stop testing their parents. This should remind us all of how our common human inclination is to test or tempt God. Rather than find ourselves upsetting or angering our Heavenly Father, **we must humble ourselves**, and give thanks and praise to Him for all that He has done for us and provided for us!

Today, I am reminded of how our simple desire to Count the Omer in obedience is *such a blessing* to Him. He sees our hearts and our desire to please Him. Just as a loving parent, who over time has seen how the results of loving instruction create a grateful heart within a child, our Father sees us the same way. It blesses me to know that He is smiling down upon us, with every intention to pour out even more gifts from above! Is it possible that He will join us as we prepare to gather and commemorate the Feast of Weeks?