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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”**

**Matthew 6, 13 (Ex 13-17; Lk 4; Mt 14; Lk 22)**

❑ **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”** (Matthew 6:13).

Yet the LORD *does* permit his children to be tempted. He does not always shield us from spiritual attack, does not always miraculously rescue us from evil circumstances.

The question is what should we make of it when God answers this request with a “No” or, harder still, with silence?

☹ Let us confess right off the bat that much spiritual struggle is self-inflicted. Temptation often comes {Jas 1:14} **“when [we] are dragged away by [our] own evil desire and enticed.”**

🔑 The solution to that problem is easily understood, even though we do not always apply it: fill your life with what is good; be accountable to others in the body; pray; avoid tempting situations; and when you stumble seek forgiveness, get up, and start over.

That is not what I am talking about today. I have in mind ferocious temptation and evil attack that is beyond our control. How do we understand and respond to that?

① Let’s start by considering **“temptation”** itself.

📖 The biblical word **“temptation”** means *enticement to sin*, which is always bad. It also means *testing*, which can be bad *or* good, depending on the “who” and the “why” of it.

While most English language Bibles use **“temptation”** in Mt 6, there is solid evidence that **“testing”** is the more accurate translation.

*What difference does this make?*

② Let’s see what the Old Testament has to say.

Matthew recorded the Lord’s Prayer in Greek, but Jesus spoke it in Aramaic. Aramaic was the first century Palestinian dialect of Old Testament Hebrew.

Jesus used the Hebrew word *massah*: **“lead us not into *massah*.”** Like its Greek equivalent, *massah* expresses both *enticement to sin* and *testing* – but it is also the name of a place.

■<sup>a</sup> Please turn to Exodus. In chapter 14 the Almighty demonstrates complete mastery over water, and commitment to Israel by parting the Red Sea. He *delivers* Israel from the condition of slavery, the place of bondage, and annihilation by the Egyptians – and 72 hours later they doubt that He is willing or able to give them a few swallows of water?! That is a bad test.

■<sup>b</sup> God provides water immediately, then leads them to an oasis. At the same time, **Exodus 15:25-26**, He “[puts] *them to the test*”: **“listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes... pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees.”** Like all of God’s tests it is a constructive opportunity for people to exercise trust and obedience.

■<sup>c</sup> A few weeks later in Exodus 16:3, Israel does it again: **“Oh, that we were back in Egypt. It would have been better if the LORD had killed us there! ...You have brought us out into the desert to starve us.”**

From that day on He sends quail each evening and manna each morning, but the people are to gather only enough for that day. **“In this way,”** God says in Exodus 16:4, **“I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.”**

■<sup>d</sup> In Exodus 17 Israel tests the LORD by demanding water again. Despite their sin, God instructs Moses to {17:6} **“Strike the rock, and water will come out...for the people to drink.”** The people’s need is satisfied.

In verse 17 we learn that Moses “[calls] the place **Massah...because the Israelites...tested [massah] the LORD saying, {NCV} ‘Is the LORD with us or not?’ {NLT} ‘Is the LORD going to take care of us or not?’”**

This is emblematic of all the times Israel failed the test of trust and obedience. And so we read in:

→ Deuteronomy 6:16 ~ **“Do not put the LORD your God to the test [massah] as you did at Massah.”**

→ Deuteronomy 9:22 ~ **“You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah.”**

→ Deuteronomy 33:8, **“You tested him at Massah.”**

→ Psalm 78:18-20, 41 ~ **“They willfully put God to the test [massah]. They spoke against God... [Moses] struck a rock and water gushed out . Again and again they put God to the test [massah].”**

→ Psalm 95:8-9 ~ **“Do not harden your hearts ... as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did.”**

→ Psalm 106:13-14 ~ **“They soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his plan to unfold. In the**

**desert they gave in to their craving; in the wilderness they put God to the test [massah].”**

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, **“Lead us not into massah”** it is hardly possible for them to miss the reference to Exodus 17.

③ Let’s look at Jesus’ experience in the Gospels.

■<sup>1</sup> Jesus is baptized. He passes through water, as Israel passed through water on the way out of Egypt. What comes next? Luke 4:1-2 ~ He “[is] **led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he [is] tempted by the devil.**” (Again, the Greek word for **“tempted”** is equivalent to the Hebrew *massah*.)

The Enemy tries to undercut the Son’s trust in and obedience to, the Father. The Father does not rescue his Son. He does not remove him from the desert, does not satisfy his physical hunger and thirst, and does not remove the anticipated burden of the cross. Yet Jesus does not repeat Israel’s sins. He passes the test with flying colors.

★ How does Jesus do it? With Scripture.

→ He takes up **“the sword of the Spirit... the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17) and uses it against the Adversary.

■<sup>1a</sup> In fact, He directly quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 ~ **“It is said: ‘Do not put the LORD your God to the test’ (“as you did at Massah”)** (Luke 4:12).

■<sup>2</sup> Later Jesus feeds a crowd of more than 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. What comes next? Jesus immediately makes **“the disciples get into the boat and go on...to the other side, while he [dismisses] the crowd. After he [dismisses] them, he [goes] up**

on a mountainside by himself to pray” (Matthew 14:22-23).

■<sup>2a</sup> Why is He so abrupt? John 6:14-15 ~ **“After the people [see] the [miracle], they say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, knowing that they [intend] to make him king by force, [withdraws] to a mountain by himself.”**

The crowd assumes Jesus is a new Moses who will take back Israel for God by feeding the people and using religion and the state to enforce good and defeat evil. This option sounds much more appealing than the lonely, humiliating, agonizing way of the cross.

→ Yet God’s plan is to establish the kingdom, not by filling our bellies, but by inviting us to {Lk 9:24} **“deny [ourselves], take up [our] cross daily and follow [him].”** Jesus has not come to improve the culture by reforming secular institutions; He is here to establish a new culture based on and embodied in the cross.

★ Jesus passes the test. How does He do it? With kingdom discernment.

→ Christ’s kingdom {Jn 18:36} **“is not of this world.”** Hence, secular politic action can never bring it about. Jesus remembers this and acts accordingly.

■<sup>3</sup> On the night of his arrest in Luke 22:42 Jesus prays: **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”**

In his anguish He prays earnestly. He begs, He implores, He cries out three times: **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.”**

This is the hardest test. It would be easier and more effective to summon twelve legions of angels to sweep

away Rome’s evil empire, Herod’s corrupt regime, and Israel’s rotten religious establishment.

→ Yet Jesus has come {Mt 20:28} **“to give his life as a ransom for many.”** He ends his plea with the words, **“not my will, but yours be done.”** Our Lord passes the test.

★ How does Jesus do it? With earnest prayer.

→ Hebrews 5:7 ~ **“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”**

But in what way? How did God save him?

The Father did *not* evacuate him from the situation, or make it easy to take; He saved his Son by resurrecting him after He died a most brutal death.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to the Lord’s Prayer it is after his showdown with Satan in the desert, and He is well-aware that He will be severely tested again.

**“This, then, is how you should pray....And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”**

Consider:

○ **“Testing”** is probably a more accurate translation than **“temptation.”**

○ *Massah* is the Aramaic-Hebrew word for both *temptation* and *testing*. It is also a place name that symbolizes Israel’s repeated sin of testing God.

○ Jesus himself faced severe testing. He was assaulted by barefaced evil again and again – but He passed each and every test.

*Could it be that this petition is less about being removed from trouble, and more an appeal for help to trust and obey God through trial and tribulation?*

Indeed, let us ask {Mt 6:9} **“Our Father in heaven”** to spare us these challenges. (I often do.) God is able to do this, and sometimes He does.

Even so, every time you and I say the Lord’s Prayer, we are committing ourselves to be like Jesus, who {Heb 12:2} **“for the joy set before him”** exercised trust and obedience in all his struggles, “[enduring even] **the cross.**” He did it with Scripture, kingdom discernment, and earnest prayer.

**“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.