

THEISM

God Tests People

To test is to examine, to try, or to investigate. The purpose of testing is first to learn, and then to accept, to reject, or to improve. Testing is a common daily practice. For example, “The ear tests words as the palate tastes food” (Job 34:3, see also Job 12:11).

People test each other in order to learn their qualities and values. Joseph tested his brothers when he required that they bring Benjamin to him whenever they might return to Egypt (Genesis 42:15). The queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to test Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kings 10:1; 2 Chronicles 9:1). Daniel and his friends were tested by a Babylonian steward (Daniel 1:14). On many occasions, the contemporaries of Jesus tested Him with disputations and questions (Matthew 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35; Mark 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Luke 10:25; 11:16; 20:23; John 6:6; 8:6). Jesus tested Phillip about how to feed five thousand men (John 6:5-6). Apelles was “approved in Christ” (Romans 16:10). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was “testing the sincerity of your love” (2 Corinthians 8:8). Deacons are first to be tested before they are appointed to their office (1 Timothy 3:10). The church at Ephesus “tested those who say they are apostles and are not” (Revelation 2:2). People test and are tested through many common and varied experiences in life.

God tests people in order to learn their hearts. “The righteous God tests the hearts and minds” (Psalm 7:9). “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3). “The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates” (Psalm 11:5). “God tested Abraham, and said to him, . . . ‘Take now your son . . . and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Genesis 22:1-2). When Abraham was about to slay his son, the “Angel of the Lord called to him . . . and said, . . . ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, . . . for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (Genesis 22:11-12). “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac” (Hebrews 11:17). In his affliction, Job understood that God was testing him. Job pondered, “What is man, that You should exalt him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?” (Job 7:17-18). David said to God, “You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness” (1 Chronicles 29:17). David once invited God to “examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my mind and my heart” (Psalm 26:2). God once withdrew from Hezekiah, “in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart” (2 Chronicles 32:31). The Apostle Paul said, “We speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Since God is unchanging (Job 23:13; Psalm 15:4; Malachi 3:6), may we not also reasonable think that God now tests us in various ways throughout life?

God tests people in order to learn whether they will obey. When the Israelites found bitter water at Marah, they were told to throw a tree into the water to make it sweet. Then God made a statute with the Israelites, saying, “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). This was a test (Exodus 15:25; Deuteronomy 33:8; Psalm 81:7). Later, when the Israelites complained that they had no food, “the LORD said, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not’” (Exodus 16:4; see also Deuteronomy 8:16). When God spoke the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, the people were

afraid. Moses then said, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). Through Moses, God instructed the Israelites that if someone encouraged another saying, “‘Let us go after other gods,’ . . . and ‘let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . . , for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him” (Deuteronomy 13:2-4). When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, but failed to remove all the wicked inhabitants as they had been commanded to do, the LORD said, “I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD” (Judges 2:21-22; 3:1-4). Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:35). If God tested Israel to learn whether or not they would keep His commandments, may we not also reasonably expect that our love for Him is now being tested by whether or not we obey His commandments?

God tests people in order to accept them, to reject them, or to improve them. Job was confident that God knew the way he took. He said, “When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). Because Israel was faithless, God said, “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10). As gold is refined to remove impurities, so also God sometimes tests people with affliction in order that they may improve. Through the prophet Zechariah, the LORD spoke about a portion of Israel, saying, “I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people;’ And each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (Zechariah 13:9). The church at Smyrna was exhorted, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. . . . He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:10-11). May we not also expect that God will accept, reject, or improve us, based upon whether or not we obey?

Several observations come from the fact that God tests us. First, to humanity God gives freedom of choice to obey or to disobey. Second, God knows that we love Him by whether or not we obey Him. Third, God rewards or punishes us depending upon whether or not we obey. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). The Lord Jesus will come “with His mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Fourth, God wants us to obey (Isaiah 55:6-7; Matthew 7:21; 11:28). And, fifth, God sometimes tests us with afflictions in order to improve us. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3). “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).