

The is a Test, This is Only a Test...

By Mary Kane

I am a member of the T.V. Generation—another name for the Baby Boomers (those born between 1946-1964). TV was a large part of our family life. “Back in the day,” families watched TV together—they did not separate after dinner and go to their private rooms to watch TV on their own entertainment devices. Believe it or not, there were actually shows on television that families could watch together. In the evenings my family enjoyed watching shows such as The Dick Van Dyke Show, I Love Lucy or The Carol Burnett Show. However, Sunday evening was the best night of the week for TV. My mother would pop a large bowl of popcorn (remember Jiffy Pop or TV Time Pop Corn?), which we munched while enjoying the thrills of Wild Kingdom and the magic of Walt Disney. Those were the days...great memories of family fun and laughter gathered around the TV set.

I have another not so positive memory of the TV years—THE TEST. THE TEST was a very unnerving announcement that would break in unawares during any television program. While relaxing and at peace with the world, a very loud piercing siren-like whistle would suddenly interrupt a favorite TV program. The loud warning whistle, usually signaling some impending doom, like an incoming nuclear warhead continued uninterrupted for about thirty seconds until the announcer finally put our minds to rest by informing us of the nature of the coming crisis. Thankfully, most of the time, the commentator conveyed that the loud siren was only a TEST—we would not indeed have to seek the nearest Fallout Shelter and eat saltines for the duration (Fallout Shelters are a topic for another Bible study). But every once in a while, there was an actual emergency and these occasions happened often enough to keep us on our toes fearing THE TEST.

God also sends us tests. They can show up when we least expect them—while we are relaxing and all is right with the world. Suddenly, out of the blue, comes a TEST. God does not send us tests to trick us; tests are for our benefit. They are tailor-made for each person, designed to help us deepen and strengthen our faith in God. Unlike THE TEST of long ago we can face our tests by drawing on the strength of the Holy Spirit, knowing that He will bring us through victoriously.

In order to prepare for our study time today, please take a moment to pray and ask God to forgive you of any sin that you need to confess, and open the eyes of your heart to receive His Holy Word. Now please read Exodus 15:22-27

From what had the Hebrew people just been delivered (verse 22)?

God had just delivered his people from the hand of Pharaoh through the Red Sea.

What test are God's people currently facing (verse 22)?

They had a water shortage on their hands—Water Test 2. Just prior to this test, God had proved that He was Lord over the water by causing the Red Sea to part before His people so they could escape Pharaoh's army. The same God who parted the Red Sea could certainly handle a water shortage.

When the people did find water, what was wrong with it?

I have heard it said that adversity brings out the contents of one's heart. Perhaps the bitterness of the water of Marah was a reflection of the bitterness residing in the hearts of God's people.

How did the people react to this test (verse 24)?

They reacted as I have often reacted and as you have often reacted...by complaining... one of my biggest vices. The Hebrew word for *complained* is *luwn*. *Luwn* means to "complain, to murmur, to grumble," but interestingly it also means "to lodge, to live, to dwell, to abide." Thus, complaining can become a lifestyle; our way of living, our default mode. Once we fall into this pit of complaining, it is hard to get out. Tests will reveal if we have a lifestyle marked by complaining and grumbling or prayer and praise.

How should the people have reacted to their test (verse 25)?

Like Moses, they should have cried out to God for help. As expected, God answered Moses and showed him how to heal the waters. God will also show us how to endure and benefit from our tests if we will cry out to Him for help.

The Hebrew word for *test* used in verse 25 is the word *nacah*, which means "to test, to try, to prove, to make a trial." This word is used over forty times in the Old Testament and is often used in reference to God testing the faith or faithfulness of His people.

On what issue does God test His people?

On whether or not they **would** depend on Him to meet their daily needs. Notice my use of the word *would*. The issue was not *could* they depend on Him but *would* they depend on Him. Let's ask ourselves the same question...will you (will I) depend on God to meet your (my) latest need? In order for us to follow God, to serve Him and be His people, our primary focus must be upon Him and His glory. We must be so deeply committed to His will that we trust Him for the provision of our daily bread –even when our situation seems hopeless.

Please read the following quote by Matthew Henry:

"That at Marah they had water, but it was bitter, so that though they had been three days without water they could not drink it, because it was extremely unpleasant to the taste or was likely to be prejudicial to their health, or was so brackish that it rather increased their thirst than quenched it, v. 23. Note, God can embitter that to us from which we promise ourselves most satisfaction, and often does so in the wilderness of this world, that our wants and disappointments in the creature may drive us to the Creator, in whose favour alone true comfort is to be had. Now in this distress, the people fretted and quarreled with Moses, as if he had done ill by them. *What shall we drink?* is all their clamour, v. 24. Note, The greatest joys and hopes are soon turned into the greatest griefs and fears with those that live by sense only, and not by faith."

Could it be that through our times of testing, God is revealing to us something that we depend on more than Him? Could it be that through

this time of testing He is working to release us from a wrong placement of our trust in order to bring us greater joy and peace? Do I want God more than my necessary bread and water? Perhaps this is the secret that Paul learned, "that in all things I have learned to be content, in want and plenty..." because he had Jesus. Jesus is the secret to being satisfied in all situations.

What would your life look like or what would you do next if you truly trusted God with the challenge that you face right now?

In this present challenge, God is waiting to reveal Himself to you in a new way. Isaiah 48:10 teaches that God *refines* us as He brings us through afflictions. Tests will grow your faith, not destroy it. You must see this present challenge through to the blessing that awaits you on other side. Keep walking. As Winston Churchill once said, "When you're going through hell, keep going."

What is waiting on the other side of the challenge that the Hebrew people faced (verse 27)?

With God guiding them, the people go from life-threatening thirst to water in abundance; from lack to plenty. Imagine what this concept means and how it applies to New Testament Christians. Think of your biggest character flaw. Now imagine not just being healed from this flaw but being transformed by repentance and the grace of God until this weakness becomes one of your greatest strengths. By the power of God we may go from immoral to righteous, victim to victor, condemned to conqueror...the lame will leap, and the deaf will speak.

God let His people experience a great physical need in order to reveal a great spiritual lack—trust. God brought to them, on purpose, a test that would reveal their need for Him.

To whom is God revealing this great lack?

The test is not for God's benefit—He already knows the content of the hearts His people. The purpose of the test is to reveal to the *people* the flaw within their own hearts. When by testing, God reveals our flaws, it is not to condemn us, but to offer us a chance to become

what we are not. As painful as it may be, what if God never revealed our flaws? We would never change. I shudder to think of the pain of remaining what I used to be

The Hebrew word for *test* also means *trial*. A *trial* can mean “to try something.” My husband and oldest son are both engineers. They both work to produce or support items for other companies. During the production process they make prototypes and run tests on them. The purpose of the tests is to reveal flaws in the products. If the tests do indeed reveal flaws, the product is reworked and tested again. This process is repeated until the product is functional and useful. God will use this same process on His people. He will test, chasten, remove, redeem, and heal until we are functional and useful for His kingdom.

Let us look at one final scripture today to confirm God’s purpose in times of testing. Please read Zechariah 13:9.

According to Zechariah 13:9, what will happen to one-third of the people?

God will *refine* and *try* them. *Refine* means to separate the metal from the dross (impurities), which weaken and deface the valuable gold. When God refines us by trials, He is in the process of removing impurities (dross) that are interfering with our relationship with Him and His calling upon our lives. The word *try* used in this verse transliterates as *bachan*, which means, “to examine, to scrutinize, to test, to rub.” The definition *rub* caught my attention. Why would the concept of testing include rubbing? As I was pondering this, an image came to my mind of a merchant rubbing the surface of a “gold” statue to reveal a core of lead or iron underneath the gold. Rubbing determines if the object is authentic or only plated. In the same way, trials and tests rub away at the surface finish of our character to reveal what resides underneath in our hearts—gold or lead. If lead is found, God will skim it off through the testing process until we become like Christ.

Please make a list of all the benefits that you learned today or learned from experience that come from times of testing:

In closing, times of testing come to everyone who has claimed Christ as Savior. When you in the middle of a season of testing, please do the following:

1. **Pray.** Ask God to give you the strength and grace you need to prosper by this testing process. Also, ask Him to reveal to you what needs to be skimmed off—any sinful attitude, action or habit.
2. **Cooperate.** Believe that God has allowed this test to come to you to benefit you not harm you (Romans 8:28). Claim that promise and rejoice in the blessing that will surely follow.
3. **Seek.** Read and study God’s Word, memorize Scripture, and listen to sermons and podcasts that speak to your present challenge. Spend time in His Presence.
4. **Minister.** There is nothing like helping others to get our minds off of ourselves.
5. **Share.** Please share your current hardship with a trusted mature Christian friend. Someone who has walked the same path can be a great encouragement.
6. **Rest.** Please take extra time to rest and relax. Do something that brings you joy and peace.

Please remember that tests last for a limited time. Jesus is with you every step of the way; interceding for you as you follow Him in obedience. If you continue to follow Him, you will pass with flying colors!

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