

Testing & the “Way of Escape”

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1 Pitfalls in Translation

It sometimes is the case that a verse or a passage of Scripture is familiar and frequently-cited, yet generally is misconstrued. In the English Bible, the misconception typically is due to the translation. The problem may be that the translation is archaic; but more often, the translation is bungled. And in not a few instances, a translation has been cunningly devised by a deceiver, with the intent to conceal or obfuscate truth. A case in point is an oft-quoted assertion by the Apostle Paul concerning testing. Here is the passage in the translation of the *King James Version*:

*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who **will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able**; but will with the temptation **also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.***
—1 Corinthians 10:13

1.1 Contradiction and Nonsense

As typically rendered in the English Bible, the verse is nonsense and contradiction. But the Apostle Paul does not contradict himself. Temptation being nothing other than a trial or test, how can it be possible for one to *bear* or *endure* a test and yet *escape* it? Or how does the existence of a way of escape enable endurance of the trial? Moreover, the provision of a way of escape itself would constitute a temptation or test, as to whether the way of escape is utilized.

Surprisingly, most readers and most teachers fail to appreciate the logical incongruity of the passage as it stands in the English Bible.¹ Discernment comes only through reading, study, thinking, and conversation.

¹The failure is a reflection of the fact that, in this day and age, the general populace is lacking in discernment; few have developed the ability to think critically. But how can it be otherwise in a people who have ceased to read; and particularly, in a people who have ceased to read, study, and memorize the Scriptures? A people pay dearly for the countless hours squandered in mindless spellbound staring at the glowing screen of a television set or a movie theater.

1.2 Vain Attempts to Make Sense of the English

Now and then, a teacher attempts to make sense of the inane translation found in the English Bible. He generally follow either of two conjectures, both of them supposing that testing or temptation is conducted in a chamber which is equipped with an escape hatch.

- The first conjecture is that once the individual being subjected to testing has reached his limit of endurance, he may exit the chamber and thus circumvent testing to a degree which he is not able to withstand.
- The second conjecture is that mere awareness of the existence of a means of escape enables the individual to endure testing which otherwise would be beyond his capability.

But both conjectures are fanciful, and both are false.

1.3 What Saith the Greek?

In order to determine the correct interpretation, it is necessary to inspect the passage in the original Greek.

The noun which in the English Bible is translated “temptation” is the Greek word *peirasmos*; the verb translated “tempt” is the cognate, *peirazo*. The meaning of *peirazo* is *to try, attempt, assay, test, or prove*. The verb translated “bear” is *upophero*, meaning literally, *to bear up under*, in the sense of endurance. It is quite clear that the possibility of escape is not in view.

The phrase translated “a way to escape” is *ekbasis*. The literal meaning of *ekbasis* is *a way out*; but the context does not allow that meaning.² However, *ekbasis* also is used in the sense of an *issue, a result, or an outcome*; and with *ekbasis* being a *result* or an *outcome*, the meaning of the passage becomes clear. With each test, the Lord provides an incentive which is sufficient to motivate endurance of the testing.

A Correct Rendering. The *Concordant Literal* translation is one of the few English translations which correctly presents the meaning of the passage. Here is the reading of the *Concordant Literal*:

No trial has taken you except what is human. Now, faithful is God, who will not be leaving you to be tried above what you are able, but, together with the trial, will be making the sequel also, to enable you to undergo it.
— I Corinthians 10:13 (CL)

The English word *sequel* means *consequence, result, subsequent development, or outcome*. Seen in this light—that of *endurance under testing in order to achieve a desired outcome*—the passage not only makes perfect sense, but immediately brings to mind another passage which presents the classic example of the concept.

1.4 The Classic Example of Testing

Surely, in consequence, then, we also, having so vast a cloud of witnesses encompassing us, putting off every impediment and the popular sin, may be racing with endurance the contest lying before us, looking off to the Inaugurator and perfecter of faith, Jesus, who, for the joy lying before him, endures a torture stake, despising the shame, besides is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
— Hebrews 12:1–2 (CL)

The author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* declares that it was “*The joy lying before him*” which enabled Christ Jesus to endure the torture stake (*stauros*).³ Of course, God the Father promised the Son resurrection and restoration

²As always, it is the context which governs the meaning of a word or a phrase.

³Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Mark 10:21, Luke 9:23. The English word *cross* does not even begin to convey the horror of the Greek word *stauros* which it translates. The object in view is a torture stake, which is a pole without a horizontal crosspiece. ¶ Economy was essential in this form of torture, for in the conquest of a city such as Jerusalem, the Romans crucified multiple thousands of victims. All that was required was a pole (the trunk of a small tree), three nails, and hole in the ground just deep enough to hold the pole upright. ¶ With the victim prone on the ground and the arms of the victim outstretched above his head, a single nail was driven through both wrists; thus did the bones of wrist support the victim, for a nail driven through the palms quickly would tear through the flesh. However, suspended only by his arms, the victim soon would suffocate, and the whole

of the attributes of deity which the Son laid aside in order to become flesh and die.⁴ But the endurance of the agony of torture was motivated by the great prize of an everlasting throne,⁵ together with a bride.⁶ It was upon those treasures that Jesus focused as he suffered; those rewards comprised the sequel for which he, by endurance of the testing, qualified.

In like manner, the follower of Christ Jesus is enabled to endure testing by the reward which the Lord offers him, namely, resurrection to Life Everlasting and birth into the family of God. The Apostle Peter likewise notes that endurance under testing is worthy of reward:

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

—1 Peter 2:19

Testing as a Measure of Spiritual Maturity. The declaration of Paul—that God will not allow the Christian to be subjected to a test he is incapable of passing—has a direct yet seldom-appreciated implication: the testing to which one is subjected is a telltale of his maturity in the spiritual realm. In other words, the spiritual mettle of the Christian is manifest by the severity of the tests he faces.

2 A False Assertion by a False Apostle

When discussing testing, Protestants often quote a passage from the *Book of James*:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

—James 1:13–15

Commentators almost unanimously attribute the *Book of James* to the half-brother of Jesus, the James who presided over the Christian assembly in Jerusalem. But that James, sometimes designated “James of Jerusalem,” was not an Apostle; nor was the *Book of James* written under the aegis of one of the Twelve Apostles. Consequently, the *Book of James* has no rightful place in the Canon of Scripture. Indeed, a careful reading of the Scripture reveals James to be an archenemy of the Christian Faith, a terror to the Apostle Peter, and a deadly enemy of the Apostle Paul. Thus, it should not be surprising to find in the *Book of James* the following assertion:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

—James 2:20–24

point of crucifixion was to subject the victim to prolonged and visible agony, so as to strike fear in the heart of the onlookers and passers-by. Thus, with the knees of the victim bent slightly, a nail was driven through the cartilage above each heel bone; the nail provided support sufficient to allow the victim to lift himself periodically to take a breath. The exertion of the repeated lifting of his body to gasp a breath, together with the restricted ability to breath, soon would exhaust the strength of the victim, who, prior to impalement, already had been weakened by severe scourging which left open cuts in the skin. The driving of nails through the wrists and through the cartilage of the heels produced unimaginable pain. ¶ Finally, despite the paintings of the Great Masters of art who have sought with pigment on canvas to depict the Crucifixion, the stake upon which Jesus was impaled was not of great length. Dropped into a hole a foot or two deep, the torture stake needed be only long enough so that the feet of the victim could not make contact with the ground; a pole ten to twelve feet in length would have been sufficient. ¶ Adding to the suffering of the victim is the shame of nakedness. Prior to impalement, the victim is stripped naked, and the soldiers assigned to kill him divide among themselves his garments. The loincloth typically shown in depictions of the Crucifixion is but an invention of the artist. The purpose of crucifixion was to induce terror in the observer, by inflicting on the victim not only suffering, but also shame.

⁴Hebrews 2:14–15, Philippians 2:5–11, Psalm 16:8–10.

⁵Psalm 2, Psalm 110.

⁶II Corinthians 11:2.

With that assertion, James of Jerusalem demonstrates himself an “*enemy of the cross*,”⁷ and the *Book of James* to be contemptible rubbish.

In this passage, the verb which the English Bible translates “tempt” is *peirazo*, meaning *to try, attempt, assay, test, or prove*. The verb translated “cannot be tempted” is *apeirastos*, a cognate meaning *not subject to testing*. The noun translated “trial” is *dokimazo*, meaning a *test* or an *episode of proving*.

2.1 Human Reasoning

Ignoring the clear teaching found throughout the Scripture regarding testing, James portrays testing invariably as evil; James reasons that testing is solicitation to sin, and to fail a test is to sin. Thereby does James imply that God cannot ordain testing, for to tempt man to sin is to commit evil. But this line of reasoning follows the perverse logic of the Talmudic Jew. Such reasoning is the reason Jesus repeated warns his followers to beware the *leaven of the Jew*.

With his assertion that God does not try, attempt, assay, test, or prove man, James demonstrates himself a liar, for his assertion is false. With this statement, James contradicts the account of the temptation of Adam in the Garden, as well as the account of the temptation of the last Adam, Christ Jesus. Moreover, James contradicts the Scriptural account of the testing of Job. And James contradicts multiple assertions regarding testing of the Just which are found throughout the Scripture.

2.2 The Purpose of the Way of Life is Sanctification

Contrary to the cunning reasoning of the false Apostle James of Jerusalem, for the Justified, the very business of this present life is Sanctification, and that necessitates repeated episodes of testing. In the pursuit of Sanctification, the Christian constantly is tested regarding *obedience* and *faith*.

And the Lord God gave a charge to Adam, saying, Of every tree which is in the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—of it ye shall not eat, but in whatsoever day ye eat of it, ye shall surely die.
— Genesis 2:16–17

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
— Matthew 4:1

And these are the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel with them, all that had not known the wars of Chanaan. Only for the sake of the generations of Israel, to teach them war, only the men before them knew them not. The five lordships of the Philistines, and every Chananite, and the Sidonian, and the Evite who dwelt in Libanus from the mount of Aermion to Laboemath. And this was done in order to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commands of the Lord, which he charged their fathers by the hand of Moses.
— Judges 3:1–4 (LXX)

And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I will rain bread upon you out of heaven: and the people shall go forth, and they shall gather their daily portion for the day, that I may try them whether they will walk in my law or not.
— Exodus 16:4 (LXX)

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.
— 1 Peter 1:6–7

⁷Philippians 3:17–19.

3 The Ultimate Escape

There is an event which comes upon every man. That event is Death. Whether the process of dying is rapid or prolonged, every man shall endure until the end—there is no escape. And though the decree of the Lord God or the technology of man grant a reprieve,⁸ the stay is only temporary.

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?

– Psalm 89:48

The Scripture portrays Death as a citadel and as a

*I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. **O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.** O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. **The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.** The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. **The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.** Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. **The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.***

– Psalm 39:1–22

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4 Conclusion

On the basis of a bungled translation, together with a false assertion from a false Apostle, many Christians have searched in vain for a door of escape from an episode of testing. But the concept of a divinely-provided “way of escape” is absent in the Greek text of the Scripture, and, moreover is incompatible with the Biblical concept of testing. The purpose of testing is to ascertain the nature and quality of the character of the individual—his obedience and his faith. Approval is given only to the one who endures the testing to the end. While the Lord God does not provide a “way of escape” from an episode of testing, he does promise that the Lord shall not allow the Christian to be tested beyond his capability.⁹ Moreover, the promise includes the assurance that, with every test, the Lord shall provide a *sequel* or *reward* sufficient to motivate the Christian to endure the trial to the end. The ultimate sequel is deliverance from the Grave to Life Everlasting, a sequel which is sufficient to motivate the endurance of any testing. Consider the Eleventh Chapter of Hebrews.¹⁰

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⁸The Lord added to the days of Hezekiah fifteen years, II Kings 20:1–11, Isaiah Chapter 38.

⁹I Corinthians 10:13.

¹⁰Faith is confidence in the sequel promised by the Lord God.