

END-TIMES ISSUES



#36 The testing of faith at Mount Sinai.

1

When the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, it was like a consuming fire, surrounded by a cloud.

When Moses went up on the mountain, **the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai.**

For six days **the cloud covered it**, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within **the cloud.**

And the sight of **the glory of the LORD** was **like a consuming fire** on the mountaintop in the eyes of the Israelites.

Moses entered **the cloud** as he went up on the mountain, and he remained on the mountain **forty days and forty nights.**

Exodus 24:15-18 (BSB)

⇒ **This is the "fire-containing" cloud that Moses entered.** The situation provided a time of testing for *both* Israel and Moses.

2

Israel's test of faith.

⇒ **WHAT** would you expect to happen if a person walked into a "blazing fireball"?

Moses did just that (or so it seemed).
And on Day 1... he didn't come out.
And on Day 2... he didn't come out.
And on Day 3... he didn't come out.
And on Day 4... he didn't come out.
Finally, after many days... **what did Israel do?**

FAIL!!

MAYBE HE GOT BURNT TO ASHES!

Now when **the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain**, they gathered around Aaron and said, "**Come, make us gods who will go before us.**"

As for this Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, **we do not know what has happened to him!**"

Exodus 32:1 (BSB)

3

⇒ **THEY HAD NO EXCUSE FOR THIS!**

- God had already done so much for them – rescuing and delivering them, guiding them, showing his love for them.
- God had already spoken directly to them from the "fireball."
- They heard God speak the commands about not having other gods or making idols; and they promised to obey these commands.
- They already *knew* that God used the events they experienced to test them – to prove whether or not they actually trusted him.

BUT DID THEY TRUST HIM? NO! Neither did they OBEY him.

But our fathers **refused to obey him.** Instead, they **rejected him** and **in their hearts turned back to Egypt.**

At that time they **made a calf** and **offered a sacrifice to the idol**, rejoicing in the works of their hands.

Acts 7:39, 41 (BSB)

4

⇒ **GOD HAD GIVEN THEM MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO TRUST HIM. TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE PROVED HIMSELF FAITHFUL. FOUR EXAMPLES:**

① **Exodus 14**

- ✓ **The Egyptian army** had them trapped, and was about to destroy them.
- ✓ **The Israelites** panicked and said they'd rather serve Egypt than die (vs. 10-12).
- ✓ **Moses** tells the people to trust God. God will do the fighting!
- ✓ **God** delivers Israel through the Red Sea and drowns the Egyptian army.

And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and **put their trust in him** and in Moses his servant.

Exodus 14:31 (NIV)

⇒ For a while, they *trusted* God. Unfortunately, it was a short-lived trust.

5

② **Exodus 15:22-27**

- ✓ **Water problems:** They were running out of water; and when they found some, it was too bitter to drink.
- ✓ **The Israelites** – discouraged; started grumbling against Moses.
- ✓ **Moses** talked to God (= prayer) and followed God's instructions (= obedience). He was to throw a specific piece of wood into the water.
- ✓ **Results:** The water became drinkable. [Ironically, there was plenty of fresh water waiting for them, just a few miles away (v. 27). If only that they had been willing to patiently *trust* God!]

⇒ God told them (or *had* told them) that they would be tested (v. 25) – to prove whether or not they would *trust* God. Trusting him would result in blessings, not cursings (v. 26).

There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there **he tested them.**

Exodus 15:25b (NIV)

6

③ Exodus 16

- ✓ **Food problems:** They were running out of food.
 - ✓ **The Israelites** – grumbled against Moses and Aaron; said that living in Egypt was better than their present situation.
 - ✓ **Moses:** You people are grumbling against *God!*
 - ✓ **Results:** God would provide food (manna, also quail), with *specific instructions* for gathering it. Some of the Israelites *ignored* God's instructions for gathering it.
- ⇒ God had already told them that such issues would be tests to see whether or not they would trust him. Some didn't...

... I will **test** whether or not they will follow My instructions.

"How long will you [Israelites] refuse to keep My commandments and instructions?"

Exodus 16:4b, 28b (BSB)

(Even if, for some, it was due to *carelessness* about paying attention to instructions, *that's no excuse when it involves commands from God.*)

7

④ Exodus 17:1-7

- ✓ **Water problems:** They were running out of water.
 - ✓ **The Israelites** – quarreled with Moses; were ready to stone him; and said it would have been better for them to remain in Egypt.
 - ✓ **Moses:** You people are grumbling against *God* (v. 2)!
 - ✓ **Results:** God would stand by a specific rock (v. 6); Moses was to strike the rock with his staff. Water would come out of it.
- ⇒ They were taking these situations, designed to test *Israel*, and using them to test *God* (= questioning *his* trustworthiness).

[Moses] named the place Massah [= "testing"] and Meribah [= "quarreling"] because the Israelites quarreled, and because **they tested the LORD**, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Exodus 17:7b (BSB)

Do not test the LORD your God as you tested Him at Massah.

Deuteronomy 6:16 (BSB)



8

⇒ THE TEST AT MOUNT SINAI BEGINS.

God reveals his presence on the mountain.

- ✓ **They saw the terrifying holiness of God** – requiring that *anything* that touched the mountain must be put to death.
- ✓ **They saw the terrifying power of God** –
 - A storm – thunder and lightning.
 - A trumpet blast that grew louder and louder.
 - A violent earthquake.
 - A blazing, consuming fire that reached to the heavens, containing the very presence and glory of God; surrounded by smoke, dark clouds, deep darkness and gloom.
- ✓ **They heard the terrifying voice of God** – a loud voice that shook the earth. God spoke to them, out of the fire and the darkness, and gave them the Ten Commandments.

(From: Exodus 19:12-19; 20:18; 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:22-26; Hebrews 12:18-21; 12:26.)

9

The people affirm the covenant.

- ✓ **Moses receives the terms of the covenant** (given after the Ten Commandments).
- ✓ **The people approve of the covenant and it is ratified** – blood sacrifices, the leaders have a meal with God, etc.
- ✓ **Moses goes back up the mountain to get further instructions** – building the tabernacle, etc. [HERE THE TEST BEGINS.](#)

THE TEST begins; but the people have already set themselves up for failure.

- ✓ **Their test would be their response to Moses' *delay in returning*** (as he stayed 40 days/nights on the mountain).
- ✓ **God had given them all the opportunities they needed to learn** to trust God and to *grow* in their trust.
- ✓ **Since they had *refused* to learn to trust God**, their hearts were still *unchanged*, and they would be unready to trust God *now*.

10

THE TEST RESULTS:

- ✓ **Results:** They failed the test. They *still* didn't trust God. They made the golden calf idol. **God's response?**

The LORD also said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are indeed **a stiff-necked people**."

Exodus 32:9 (BSB)

This would become the *ongoing* response of the people. *God* would *continue* to remain faithful, and remind them that they needed *changed hearts*. But *they* would continue to *not* listen.

- ✓ **They needed to be Israelites *spiritually*, not just *physically*.**

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and **stiffen your necks no more.**

Deuteronomy 10:16 (BSB)

- Circumcision: symbolizing Abraham's trust in God (when God promised him offspring). The Jews practiced the *physical* act, but were not concerned about what it taught about *trusting God*. (See also Romans 2:25-29.)

11

- ✓ **In the future: There would be *temporary* times of repentance, but *not trusting or obeying God* would characterize them... *even today*.**

Understand, then, that it is **not because of your righteousness** that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are **a stiff-necked people**.

Remember this, and never forget how **you provoked the LORD your God** in the wilderness. From the day you left the land of Egypt until you reached this place, **you have been rebelling against the LORD**.

Deuteronomy 9:6-7 (BSB)

MOST ARE STILL THIS WAY, AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION.

"You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! **You always resist the Holy Spirit**, just as your fathers did.

Which of the prophets did your fathers fail to persecute? They even killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One. And now you are His betrayers and murderers— you who **received the law ordained by angels, yet have not kept it."**

Act 7:51-53 (BSB)

12

Moses also had a test of faith.

PASS!!

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."

Exodus 24:12 (NIV)

⇒ **WHAT** would you expect "stay here" might mean?

Journey up to the cloud.
And on Day 1... nothing.
And on Day 2... nothing.
And on Day 3... nothing.
Finally, after waiting 6 days ... he's told "Come into the cloud!"
And then... 40 more days!

⇒ **These 40 days began Israel's test.** To them, it was 40 days of "silence" – at least they saw nothing happening.

13

⇒ **Moses' test** was not easier than theirs; but it was different. Also, his *previous* trust in God prepared him for it.

- ✓ Like Israel, he had to wait. But he patiently trusted God.
- ✓ When told to enter into the presence of the "fireball," he trusted God – that he would not be consumed – and obeyed.

⇒ **There was also a second test**, *greater* than the first, which occurred after the people rebelled and worshipped the golden calf.

- ✓ **God offered to destroy the Israelites** (which they deserved) and make Moses into a great nation...

The LORD also said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people.

Now leave Me alone, so that My anger may burn against them and consume them. Then **I will make you into a great nation.**"

Exodus 32:9-10 (BSB)

14

- ✓ **Moses refused** the offer ... and instead, interceded for Israel. Because of this, they were not destroyed.

- **More than that, he was concerned about God's honor.**

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God, saying, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"

Why should the Egyptians declare, 'He brought them out with evil intent, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them from the face of the earth'?

Turn from Your fierce anger and relent from doing harm to Your people. **Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel**, to whom You swore by Your very self when You declared, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this land that I have promised, and it shall be their inheritance forever.'

Exodus 32:11-13 (BSB)

15

- ✓ **The result of all this? God himself said he passed the test for faithfulness!**

- ✓ *At a later time, when others challenged Moses' authority...*

[God] said, "Listen to my words:

"When a prophet of the LORD is among you,
I reveal myself to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams.

But this is not true of **my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house.**
With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Numbers 12:6-8 (NIV)

PASS!!

16

What do we learn from this? (There's value TODAY!)

⇒ **Words are not enough.**

The people claimed to be willing to follow God. But when the test came, they failed – and would continue to fail in the future. *Even though God had repeatedly proven himself to be trustworthy, they were unwilling to trust him.*

What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

[Illustration here; and more illustrations after v. 17.]

So too, **faith by itself, if it does not result in action, is dead.**

James 2:14, 17 (BSB)

First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and **prove their repentance by their deeds.**

Acts 26:20 (NIV)

17

⇒ **We should not be surprised when the faith/trust we claim to have is tested.**

It shows whether or not our claim is legitimate.

Dear friends, **do not be surprised** at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

1 Peter 4:12 (NIV)

These [trials] have come **so that your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—**may be proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:7 (NIV)

- **WARNING:** The "faith/trust" of some will prove to be *fake*.

They believe for a while, but **in the time of testing they fall away.**

Luke 8:13 (NIV)

18

⇒ **God tells us to learn from Israel's failures.**
 (We should also learn from Moses' example!)

Now these things occurred as **examples** to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ...

These things happened to them as **examples** and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 (NIV)

- The book of Hebrews tells us to NOT follow Israel's "backwards" example. People need tested, *not God!*

So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion**, during the time of testing in the desert, where **your fathers tested and tried me** ...

Hebrews 3:7-9a (NIV)

19

[Here are a couple more observations to consider ...]

⇒ **Present sin can have future consequences – especially if we don't repent.**

It makes *future* sin easier.

- If this characterizes us, we are in danger of being like Israel... and will never recognize the connection (direct or indirect) between various events and choices in life.

⇒ **We need to be careful about our attitude toward God.**
 ★ This will influence everything! ★

20

★ **If we are willing to learn from *their* examples, we may be more prepared for trials that we may experience in the future.** ★

⇒ **Many in Israel had a temporary "faith."**

Scripture warns us that this is a *real* issue we need to watch out for.

- As the end approaches, trials will increase. This will cause many to depart from the faith – Matthew 24:10.
- But this can happen even *now*... And not just because of trials (such as the many examples we've looked at), but also because of false teaching (as mentioned in Acts 20:29-31; 2 Peter 3:17).

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NIV)

21

Our Mission

TRUST God during trials! He is faithful!

No **trial*** has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: **He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear**, but with the **trial** will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NET)

Blessed is the man who **perseveres under trial**, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the **crown of life** that God has promised to **those who love Him**.

James 1:12 (BSB)

* (Many translations use the word "temptation." The N. T. Greek word can be translated as *either* "trial" or "temptation." It can also be translated as a "test.")

22

Credits

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23