

PASSING THE TEST

Three Tests God Ordains for His People

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10

INTRODUCTION:

Based upon your own spiritual experience, do you tend to learn more about God in times of prosperity or in times of adversity?

Nivine Richie, a university finance professor and women's bible study teacher in Wilmington, N.C., is credited with framing the categories for this topical subject. I want to take these categories and exposit them from the Scripture. As I scanned through my emails Monday morning, David Murray's HeadHeartHand blog captured my attention. It was a post entitled *Resist the Devil*. He began by admitting,

"I wasn't good at math when I was in school. I knew I wasn't going to do well in the exams, so I didn't even try. I just gave up without a fight. If I'd thought I could actually do well, I would have studied much harder. I would have put in the time and effort because I had a hope that it would all be worth it. But I was hope-less. I was defeated before I started. So, I didn't even try."

It occurred to me that often, we as Christians feel the same way about *God's tests*—defeated before we start. Perhaps not *hope-less*, but surely not *confident* that the outcome will be favorable. I believe the reason for this is the way we view *God's tests*. Good teachers don't give students tests for the sake of the teacher, but for the benefit of the student. Right? Good teachers don't ask test questions because they need to know the answers. They ask questions because *the students need to know the answers*. In the same way, God ordains tests for us, not for His sake, but for ours.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we find language which reveals that *God truly tests His people*, and because He is the same "*yesterday and today and forever*" (*Heb.13:8*), we can be sure that He ordains tests for us. Here are some clear verses that reveal that God tests His people.

- **Job 23:10**—But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
- **Psalms 11:4-5**—The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven;
His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.
⁵ The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.
- **Psalms 66:10**—For You have tried us, O God;
You have refined us as silver is refined.
- **Proverbs 17:3**—The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the LORD tests hearts.
- **Isaiah 48:10**—Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

- **Jeremiah 17:10**—I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind.
Even to give to each man according to his ways,
According to the results of his deeds.
- **James 1:2-3**—Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

These are just a sampling of the many verses which teach that God tests people—the lost and the saved, the righteous and unrighteous. He tests the mind and the heart, and His tests involve affliction and bring reward. The question is, what are the reasons for His tests? Are there different kinds of tests? As we survey the terrain of the Bible, we discover three kinds of tests in Scripture.

- First, there are *diagnostic tests*.
- Second, there are *educational tests*.
- Third, there are *certification tests*.

The first test is a test to help us see *where we are*. The second test is a test to help us discover *what we need*. The third test is designed to help us examine *if we are fit*. You might think of it this way,

- **Diagnostic tests** reveal your *condition*.
- **Educational tests** give you *preparation*.
- **Certification tests** affirm your *qualification*.

Not all tests are designed with the same purpose (*and some we never fully understand in this life*). But this is what we do know, God's tests are for our good and His glory. In our text, we discover a *diagnostic test* that can be applied to our own lives today.

CONTEXT:

Moses is speaking to the younger generation that had witnessed the 40-year wilderness wanderings of their parents and grandparents, all of whom have died. They are on the edge of the land of promise. Looking back, they could see that God had moved mighty rulers and opened the Red Sea to bring them to this place. Now in Deuteronomy, we discover God promising again that He will be faithful to the covenant that He made with their forefathers, BUT their *happiness, victory, blessings, or successes* would be linked to a wholehearted commitment of devotion to Him. Deuteronomy is a book for believers who are *living on the edge of a hostile culture*. Just as Israel was about to face the challenge of living in a land occupied by idolatrous people, we live in a culture that is hostile to the faith. How do we maintain that *distinctive* identity in a culture that is determined to reshape our convictions?

The book of Deuteronomy answers—only a consistent, wholehearted dedication to remain faithful to the true and living God will enable the people of God to maintain a vibrant relationship with Him and be a powerful testimony for Him. Quoted in the New Testament more than any book of the Old Testament (nearly 200 times), Deuteronomy was the book our Savior used to take refuge in and beat off the enemy.

EXPOSITION:

Deuteronomy 8 summarizes the best and worst possibilities for Israel's future. Whether they would rise to heights of blessing or sink into destruction would depend upon their attitude toward His Word. This chapter marshals the strong arguments against the deceitfulness of pride and for a conscious, thankful reliance upon God.

Even the wisest people learn very little from their successes; and it is no different with us. In this chapter, we discover God warning His people against allowing victories (which He will grant) to lead them into pride and spiritual indifference. This is a spiritual "heads-up" for the test we are sure to face in life. Because of the Fall, and the remaining corruption in our nature, blessings can become a stumbling block to spiritual progress. God blesses, but instead of getting better, we rejoice for a while and then those very blessing result in pride and lukewarmness in our spiritual lives. What is the way to avoid this cycle? Here Moses urges God's people and us to learn from **hindsight** (*looking back*), **foresight** (*looking forward*), and **insight** (*looking within*).

A. THE IMPACT OF HINDSIGHT (vv.1-5)

If Israel was to truly live and prosper, what did they need to do? What impact was looking back to make on them? Although Moses was the humblest man who ever lived (apart from Christ), he was also a bold and mighty preacher (prophet). He begins by exhorting them to *obey God*.

All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers.² You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.³ He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.⁵ Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

Israel is on the verge of going into the promised land, and Moses declares to them that the key to really living as God desired them to was to obey.

1. An exhortation to obey (v.1)

"All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers.

What does the Bible mean by obedience? The general concept of obedience in both the Old and New Testaments relates to hearing or hearkening to a higher authority. One of the Greek terms for obedience in the Bible conveys the idea of positioning oneself under someone by submitting to their authority and command. Another Greek term for obey means "to trust." Holman's Illustrated Bible dictionary offers this succinct definition of biblical obedience: Biblical obedience is "to hear God's Word and act accordingly."

Eerdman's Bible Dictionary echoes that thought but adds, "True hearing or obedience involves the physical hearing that inspires the hearer, and a belief of trust that in turn motivates the hearer to act in accordance with the speaker's desires."

Why is obedience to God important?

Obedience reveals if we fear God.

- **Genesis 22:1-2**—Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ² He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”
- **Genesis 22:12**—He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

God delights in obedience over sacrifice.

- **1 Samuel 15:22**—Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.

Obedience is an act of worship.

- **Romans 12:1**—Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

Obedience proves our love for God.

- **1 John 5:2-3**—By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Obedience demonstrates our faith.

- **1 John 2:3-6**—By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Jesus calls us to obey (*John 14:15*), and obedience is rewarded by God and brings His blessings (*Gen.22:18; Luke 11:28*).

2. A reason for affliction (vv.2-5)

How was the nation encouraged to follow the Lord?

²You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years,

The leading of God had a two-fold purpose.

a. To humble them (v.2a)

that He might humble you,

Why would God need to humble a nation of former slaves? Because pride is native to the human heart. It knows no socioeconomic or racial boundary. Pride was the first sin and it forms as the wellspring for all others (*Prov.6:16-17*).

b. To test them (v.2b)

testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.

One of the purposes of God's tests in our lives, is not so that He might *gain information* about us. He already knows all things (*Ps.139; John 2:24*). God's testing in His leading of Israel was to *reveal to them whether obedience to His commands was their intent*. The coming invasion of Canaan would be that test.

As they looked back, they were to remember that the humbling and testing was so...

³...that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

Why did God humble them and then feed them? To teach them a critical lesson. Their spiritual needs are as profound as their physical needs.

Think about it. When you have physical needs for things like food, water, shelter, or clothing, you insist on the fact that they are essential needs that must be met. You feel as if you cannot live without these things, and they must be satisfied. In the same way that our physical needs must be met, Moses explains that there is only one thing that satisfies the spiritual longings of your heart and soul—that is, *every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*.

Moses pointed out how God not only provided food, but He also miraculously provided for their clothing and health.

⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.

This miracle was astounding.

But it was critical for the nation to know in their heart that the painful experiences they underwent in the wilderness were the product of a loving and sovereign Father.

⁵ Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

What is the difference between punishment and discipline? The difference has to do with the intent behind the actions and the affections which motivated them. People will sometimes punish to exact judgment for some past action. God disciplines us to teach us and grow us into Christlikeness.

Application: God's loving test of discipline brings us face-to-face with our pride. And when He disciplines us through a test, it is not a sign of rejection, but a mark of affection. God does provide for the material well-being and comfort of His children, but prosperity can pose a threat to our spiritual well-being. So how do we benefit from hindsight? Ask God to reveal to you any point where pride has become a barrier to His best in your life.

Is it pride in skill? Family? Possessions? Education?

Think about how any of these things have subtly weakened your dependence on God and allowed your commitment to Him slip. Now determine by His grace, to move in a new direction.

B. THE IMPLICATIONS OF FORESIGHT (vv.6-10)

⁶Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. ⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

Hindsight looks back. Foresight looks forward. As they nation looked forward, what would tell them if, in fact, they were acting in wisdom and had learned the lesson? Notice, Moses described three categories of the life God desired.

1. **The first category is behavioral**—Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God.
2. **The second category is habitual**—to walk in His ways.
To walk in God's ways goes deeper and means to act in a way that was consistent with the character of God, regardless of whether it was addressed by a specific command.
3. **The third category is motivational**—and to fear Him.
A true fear of God is a reverential fear that motivates you not to take chances with questionable matters that could dishonor God.

Now what should motivate this kind of behavior and habitual morality? It was not only the fear of what God might do if they violated His covenant, it was also to be based on how generous and faithful God had been to them.

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

- A good land of **brooks of water**, of **fountains** and (underground) **springs**—would provide water for their families and their animals and crops.
- **Flowing forth in valley and hills** reveals that the underground springs would emerge in valleys and hills making it possible to grow wheat and barley.

- **A land of vine and fig trees and pomegranates, olive oil, and honey** indicates that the place would yield useful caches of fruit and delicious treats that would bring them joy.
- **A land where you will eat food without scarcity** pointed to the abundance that Israel would lack nothing.
- The natural fertility of the land would also contain mineral wealth. Its stones would contain **iron** that could be used for weapons and household implements. **Copper** deposits would afford them the luxury of trade exports to make more wealth.

So why did God give them this foresight into the land filled with resources? It was designed to have a spiritual impact.

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

Now, when you combine the hindsight and the foresight, it shows us how God uses positive reinforcement and painful adversity to achieve His purposes with His people. Oh, how wise God is, for He knows how to apply these elements in precisely the perfect portions to accomplish His will.

- **Isaiah 55:11**—So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

Application: Does the Lord's desire for praise suggest some inner need for compliments? Absolutely not! God is satisfied in and of Himself. But "*praise is becoming to the upright*" (Ps.33:1). The implication of foresight is that since we don't see what's ahead, and God does, it would be wise to listen to Him now and prepare ourselves for the test to come.

C. THE IMPORTANCE OF INSIGHT (vv.11-20)

¹¹ "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; ¹² otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*, ¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water*; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. ¹⁶ In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. ¹⁷ Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' ¹⁸ But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is this day*. ¹⁹ It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish. ²⁰ Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God."

A godly person is as much of a student of himself as he/she is of God. And the unguarded heart always leads to destructive choices and a ruined life. But the question is, when does the greatest test come? God reveals through Moses that the greatest danger comes when the crisis is over, and we seem to have won the battle. So, here we find God giving His people and us two practical warnings or insights.

1. Prosperity engenders forgetfulness. In other words, when life is less tense, we are lulled into a false sense of independence.

¹¹ "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; ¹² otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*, ¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Think about it. Israel was a homeless nation. Ex-slaves. But once the battle was over and their enemies lay vanquished and their homes were built and their personal finances increased, then their hearts would become proud—and with pride comes a lack of need.

How can we overcome this spiritual danger? We need spiritual alertness! We need to know that we are most vulnerable when things are going well, when prosperity comes into our lives—and it is at these times what we need to elevate our spiritual diligence.

2. Adversity cultivates dependence.

¹⁶ In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. ¹⁷ Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' ¹⁸ But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day. ¹⁹ It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish. ²⁰ Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

The greatest barrier to enjoying God's blessings is not the enemies of the people of God across the Jordan River, or your neighbor relatives, or local, state, or federal politicians. The enemy lies deep within the pride-stained heart of every Israelite and every sinner.

CONCLUSION:

God's antidote for the foolish conclusion that we somehow produce our blessings from our own strength and ability is this:

- ¹⁸ But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.

The successes and blessings that God's people enjoy come as a confirmation of His covenant promises made to our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember, even the wisest people learn little from their successes. God warns His people against allowing their victories (that He will grant) to lead them into pride and spiritual indifference.

The cure—pay close attention to every word that comes from the mouth of God.

In the early hours of a wet Evansville morning, a driver lost control of his vehicle and smashed into the front of Lee Roy Cook's home. When a utility crew came to the house and began to check for gas leaks, they found that the home's chimney and gas pipes were plugged by debris. Because of this, carbon monoxide fumes had been backing up into the house for some time.

The poisonous and odorless gas had been creating health problems for Cook for a while. Some two years before, he had begun experiencing flu-like symptoms, including unexplained trembling, headaches, chills, and nausea. He would also black out intermittently and undergo periods of forgetfulness. "I'd come to when I got in the fresh air," he said, "but every day it was getting worse and worse. It was awful."

Had the utility vehicle not made its unauthorized entry, he might well have died from the poisonous effects of the gas. Now here is the ironic twist to the story...

Lee Roy Cook once made his living as a building contractor. He knew the perils of badly vented furnaces and chimneys. In fact, he used to regularly tell his customers to check their flue every two or three years to keep that kind of problem from happening. It never dawned on him to check his own chimney.

That's the danger we all make spiritually. Unbelief can rob God's people of the joys that He intends for us have. When we receive God's blessings, we must be careful not to neglect drawing the implication of those blessings. How have God's blessings resulted in greater obedience in your life and mine?

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