

## Do Not Tempt the Lord

You have left your life of sin and service to the world and thus to Satan. You have chosen to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have been baptized in water. Now you are living your life in this world as you wait for Christ to come and carry you to heaven. Do you constantly complain about how hard your life is? Do people around you consider you a generally unhappy person? Is there a negative atmosphere around you? Without saying anything, would your life recommend being a follower of Christ to others? Or would they say, "I certainly don't want to be a follower of Jesus. All those people do is cry and complain!"

God delivered the ancient Israelites from a life of slavery to Pharaoh. The Lord took them through the Red Sea symbolizing their baptism. The Israelites traveled through the desert which symbolizes our life in this world. They were given an opportunity to develop trust in God. The apostle Paul tells us:

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

As we travel through the desert of this world to the promised land of heaven, we have the example of the Israelite's experience to guide us.

Too often the Israelites were unhappy, complaining and developing an outward distrust in God.

1 Corinthians 10:9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;

Today we will look at the event that Paul is talking about in this text.

Let us turn to Numbers 21:4.

Numbers 21:4-5 <sup>4</sup>Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. <sup>5</sup>And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

This wasn't the first time the Israelites complained. They once again said that they were better off without God in Egypt than with God while passing through the desert. They didn't like the food God provided for them. They couldn't see water so they complained about that.

The situation has a deeper history. God had promised to take them through the land of Edom on the way to the promised land.

Deuteronomy 2:4-7 'And command the people, saying, "You *are about to* pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be

afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. <sup>5</sup> "Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you *any* of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau *as* a possession. <sup>6</sup> "You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink. <sup>7</sup> "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God *has been* with you; you have lacked nothing."'

God had miraculously supplied water and manna to the Israelites for 40 years in the desert. Why had they wandered 40 years in the desert? They had rebelled against God and He swore that the adult males who left Egypt would all die in the desert. Only their children would go in.

At last the Israelites are near the end of their journey and God said that they would buy water and food with money. So there was no further need of a miraculous supply of food and water. What did the Israelites do when God quit giving them water from the ground and manna from heaven?

Numbers 20:2-5 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! <sup>4</sup> "Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? <sup>5</sup> "And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It *is* not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor *is* there any water to drink."

The Israelites accused Moses of bringing them to a horrible place. It wasn't true. God had led them all the way. God was not pleased with the people and yet He once again gave them water from the rock. But notice what happened after that. God had said previously that the Israelites would go through Edom.

Numbers 20:14-21 Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, <sup>15</sup> 'how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. <sup>16</sup> 'When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. <sup>17</sup> 'Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.' " <sup>18</sup> Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my *land*, lest I come out against you with the sword." <sup>19</sup> So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing *more*." <sup>20</sup> Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong

hand. <sup>21</sup> Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

Now the Israelites were going around Edom which was the long, hard way. What happened? They did not trust God. They murmured and complained and God did not work the miracle that He would have worked for them. The road of the Israelites became longer and harder.

What blessings from God are you missing out on because you do not trust God? Have your complaints reached to the ear of God and He permits more hardship to come upon you until you learn to trust Him?

Numbers 21:4-5 <sup>4</sup>Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. <sup>5</sup>And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

Numbers 21:6-9 So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup> Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

God did not make a miracle to bring the serpents in. They were already there. By removing His protection the Israelites were reminded that God had been taking care of them all along. Why did God have Moses make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole? Surely there was no power in the bronze serpent to heal a venomous wound.

God was calling on the Israelites to trust His word. If they looked, they would be healed. They only needed to believe God. God would provide the necessary miracle.

Jesus used this experience of the Jews in the desert to illustrate the way of salvation.

John 3:14-15 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus committed no sin. But He was killed as a common criminal. God put the sins of the world on Jesus and He paid the penalty of sin for us. Jesus instructs us to believe in Him and He will provide the miracle necessary for eternal life.

Look to Jesus and live.

Many people say, "That is too simple. That cannot be the way of salvation." So they refuse to believe in Christ. They are actually rejecting God's word because it is written:

Matthew 17:5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

And Jesus said,

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Therefore do not tempt the Lord but believe His promises. Who knows what miracle He has planned for you!