

James Lesson One Article

Testing the Strength of Our Faith

God told Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, *that I may test them*, whether or not they will walk in My instruction” (Ex. 16:4; cf. Deut. 13:3–4). We are told of King Hezekiah that “God left him alone *only to test him*, that He might know all that was in his heart” (2 Chron. 32:31). In His omniscience God already knew what was in Hezekiah’s heart, but He wanted the king to discover that truth for himself. Jesus mentioned many *tests* of true faith, which included a caution to would-be disciples: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Habakkuk, pondering God’s devastating warning that He was sending the Chaldeans to conquer and all but decimate His people, testified, “Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17–18). After questioning God’s wisdom and justice in allowing him to experience such unbelievably terrible afflictions, Job confessed to his Lord, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).¹

Weaning Us of Worldly Dependence

The more we accumulate material possessions and worldly knowledge, experience, and recognition, the more we are tempted to rely on them instead of the Lord. These things can include education, work success, important people we know, honors we may have been given, and many other types of worldly benefits that often are not wrong in themselves but can easily become the focus of our concern and the basis of our trust.

On one occasion when a large crowd followed Jesus and the disciples to a mountain, Jesus asked Philip, “ ‘Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?’ This He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do” (John 6:5–6). Philip failed the test, replying, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little” (v. 7). Instead of trusting the Lord to provide, Philip looked only at their material resources, which obviously were far short of being able to meet the need.

Moses had been raised in Pharaoh’s house, brought up as a prince of Egypt, trained in the highest Egyptian learning, and had reached the apex of Egyptian society and personal success. Then, after forty years in Midian as a shepherd (Ex. 2:11–25), the Lord called him to take his people out of Egypt. And, although he resisted and argued at first, obedience to the Lord and concern for the plight of the Lord’s chosen people eventually became his devotion. The writer of Hebrews tells us that “by faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Heb. 11:24–26).²

^{1 2} MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). *James*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (17, 18). Chicago: Moody Press.