

Testing or Temptation¹

The NT talks about temptation and about testing. Are they different?

I raise this question because there's actually some confusion between them as English translations interchange the two. For example:

Matthew 4:1 (NKJV) – *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Matthew 4:1 (NMB²) – *Then Jesus was led away by the Spirit into wilderness, to be tried by the devil.*

Matthew 4:1 (NTE³) – *Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the spirit to be tested by the devil.*

There should be no confusion between these 2 (or 3) terms because they are completely different, and any misunderstanding leads us into untruth (false theology).

The Greek word *peirazō* is used in the NT and has the following meanings:⁴ 'objectively test', 'endeavour', 'scrutinize', 'entice', 'discipline', 'assay', 'examine', 'go about', 'prove', 'tempt', and 'try'. Because of the wide use of the term, it is often translated in English as: 'prove', 'examine', 'test', 'trial' and 'temptation'. As these 5 words have different meaning in English, translating them from 1 Greek word causes us to mix up what the writer was trying to convey.

The main way translators determine which of the 5 to use in a verse, they look at the context. If we don't do the same thing when reading the verse – looking at it in context – we can misunderstand the text. This also creates contradictions in message of the NT that should not happen. Here's some of the contradictions that have already occurred:

James 1:13 (NKJV) – *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

But Jesus' statement here contradicts this:

Matthew 6:13 (NKJV) – *And do not lead us into temptation.*..

Why do we need to ask God not to put us in temptation when he doesn't tempt us????

Now that we know that *peirazō* can be translated five different ways, we can harmonize the NT so there's no contradiction. We do this by agreeing with James 1:13 and read Matthew 6:13 as "lead us not into trials".

There is no cross reference to support James 1:13, so why should we accept it as the foundation to our dilemma and not the reverse (i.e. accepting Jesus saying "temptation")?

The reason is the context of the James verse. Following the statement in verse 13, James goes on as follows:

James 1:14-16 (NKJV) – *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.*

So we are the cause of temptation, not God.

See how context is critical to remove contradiction?

1 – Based on: Jonathan Welton "The Purpose of Temptation" October 12, 2017 [Welton Academy blog] (weltonacademy.com/blogs/jonathanwelton/the-purpose-of-temptation-1)

2 – New Matthew Bible

3 – New Testament for Everyone

4 – Strong's definition

Following on from this, we can now remove the confusion about tempting God.

In a number of places in English Bibles there is the injunction not to tempt God. For example:⁵

Luke 4:12 (NKJV) – *And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said⁶, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”*

But God can’t be tempted to sin.⁷ Therefore the above verse should read: “You shall not **test** the LORD your God”. This agrees with the origin of the statement in the OT because that’s where Israel ‘tried God’s patients’ by their rebellion in the wilderness at Massah. When they ran out of water, they had murmured, “Is the LORD among us or not?”⁸.

It should be clear now the difference between temptation and testing, even though they are both translated from the same Greek word.

IMPORTANT: The Bible must be read in context⁹ and all contradictions ironed out as the message in it is harmonious.

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5 – Matthew 4:7

6 – Deuteronomy 6:16

7 – James 1:13

8 – Exodus 17:7

9 – Jonathan Welton (July 25, 2017) “The 5 Points on How to Interpret the Bible” [blog]

(weltonacademy.com/blogs/jonathanwelton/the-5-points-on-how-to-interpret-the-bible)