

Question: What does the word “tested” mean in Exodus 15:25?

Understanding the Passage

Exodus 15:24-25 (NKJV):

And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them.

Here, the word tested (Hebrew: *nāsāh*) does not refer to tasting food or drink but rather to examining or proving someone’s faithfulness. God allowed this moment at Marah to reveal what was in the hearts of the Israelites and to teach them to trust Him fully (see also Deuteronomy 8:2).

Why Does God Test His People?

1. To Reveal What’s in Our Hearts

God’s tests are not for His knowledge—He already knows all things (Psalm 139:1–4)—but for our own awareness. Trials show us whether we are walking in obedience or rebellion.

2. To Refine and Strengthen Faith

Tests are like fire that purifies gold (1 Peter 1:6–7). They remove impurities and deepen our dependence on Him.

3. To Prepare Us for Greater Blessings

Before leading Israel into the Promised Land, God had to prepare them through testing. Likewise, He prepares us for His promises by shaping our character through trials (James 1:2–4).

Jesus Weighs Our Spiritual Temperature

The risen Christ addressed the church in Laodicea using similar imagery:

Revelation 3:15-16 (ESV):

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Here, “lukewarm” describes spiritual complacency—outward religiosity without wholehearted devotion. God finds this more offensive than open unbelief because it misrepresents Him.

Lessons from Israel’s Wilderness Testing

God’s testing at Marah was just the beginning. Throughout their journey, Israel faced repeated tests:

At Rephidim, where they complained of no water (Exodus 17:1-7).

At Sinai, where God gave His law to test their obedience (Exodus 20:20).

At Kadesh Barnea, where their unbelief barred them from the land (Numbers 13-14).

These moments revealed whether they trusted God’s character or defaulted to grumbling. Sadly, many failed.

God also warned that the Promised Land itself would “vomit out” its inhabitants if they defiled it with sin, just as it had vomited out the Canaanites before them:

Leviticus 18:25-28 (NKJV):

For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants... lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

This shows that holiness is required to dwell in God’s blessings. God’s presence is not compatible with unrepentant sin.

Application: Are You Hot, Cold, or Lukewarm?

This passage challenges us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5):

Are we hot—zealous for God, eager to obey Him?

Are we cold—far from Him and openly rebellious?

Or are we lukewarm—half-committed, trying to live for God and the world at the same time?

Lukewarmness shows up when someone goes to church on Sunday but indulges in sinful habits the rest of the week, or professes Christ yet lives no differently from unbelievers. This double life is what Christ condemns.

God’s Desire in Testing

Even in judgment, God’s goal is restoration. He disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6) and calls lukewarm believers to repent and open the door of fellowship:

Revelation 3:19-20 (NKJV):

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving us enough to test us and reveal what is in our hearts. Forgive us for lukewarmness and half-hearted devotion. Ignite our hearts with holy zeal so that when You test us, You will find faithfulness. Keep us pure until the day of Christ's return. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

What Does It Mean That God “Tested” Them? (Exodus 15:25)

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