

**PROFESSOR TOM McDANIEL'S NOTES
ON MATTHEW 6:13**

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

A reading of Chapter VII in the deuterocanonical book of Second Maccabees is required before the proper interpretation of Matthew 6:13 becomes apparent. Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, (175–164 B.C.) decided to make Hellenism the culture of his kingdom. As a consequence all elements of the Judaic culture in his empire had to be destroyed. Second Maccabees 7:1–42 tells of the martyrdom of seven Jewish brothers and their mother who were “arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine’s flesh.” All of the tortured family members died after their affirmation that “the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for His laws.” Antiochus Epiphanes had *tempted* everyone in that family to transgress the Jewish dietary laws. If they yielded to the temptation the torture would be terminated, otherwise they would die for disobeying an imperial edict. For Antiochus Epiphanes this Jewish family failed his test and deserved to die; but for the pious people in the Jewish community this faithful family passed the test. Understandably many persecuted Jews after the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes—who were not ready for martyrdom would have prayed,

“Oh God, lead us not into such temptation;

let us not be so tested.

Deliver us from every evil Epiphanes!”

The problematic word in Matthew 6:13 is the Greek noun *πειρασμόν* (*peirasmón*) “test, trial, temptation.” It was used to translate the Aramaic and Hebrew nouns *נִסְיָוֹן* (*nissāyōn*) and *מִסָּה* (*missāh*), which are derivatives from the verbs *נָסָה* (*nāsāh*) and *נִסָּה* (*nissāh*) “to test, to try, to tempt”—verbs which could have positive as well as negative overtones. In Psalm 26:2, for example, the psalmist prayed with confident expectation,

בְּחַנְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִסְנִי צָרְפָה כְּלֵי־לִבִּי וְלִבִּי

(*bēhānēnī YHWH wēnassēnī šārēpāh kilyōtay wēlibbī*)

“Test me, LORD, and try me; purify-with-fire my kidneys and my heart.”

The Septuagint [25:2] reads here *δοκίμασόν με κύριε καὶ πείρασόν με πύρωσον τοὺς νεφρούς μου καὶ τὴν καρδίαν μου*, “Prove me, O Lord, and try me; purify-with-fire my kidneys and my heart.” The New American Standard, paraphrasing a bit, reads “Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.” Either way the psalmist, like a sportsman hoping for a gold medal, look forward to being tried tested.

There are a number of verses in the Torah and Epistles which speak of God’s *testing* his people, including:

Genesis 22:1

Now it came to pass after these things that God *tested*

(*נִסָּה* [*nissāh*] = ἐπέραζεν [*epeirazen*]) Abraham,

and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Exodus 15:25

There he made a statute and an ordinance for them.

And there **he tested him** (נִסָּהוּ [nissāhū]) = ἐπείραζεν αὐτὸν [epeirázen autòn]).

Exodus 16:4

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.

And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day,
that I may **test** them (נִסָּהוּ [ñanassennū] = πειράσω αὐτοὺς [peiráso autoùs]),
whether they will walk in My law or not.”

Exodus 20:20

And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear;
for God has come to **test** (נִסָּהוּ [nasôt] = πειράσαι [peiráσαι]) you,
and that his fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”

James 1:12–13

Blessed is the man who endures **trial** (πειρασμόν [peirasmón]),
for when he has been approved he will receive the crown of life
which God has promised to those who love him.

Let no one say when he is **tempted** (πειραζόμενος [peirazómenos]),

“I am **tempted** (πειράζομαι [peirázomai]) by God”;

for God cannot be **tempted** (ἀπειραστός [apeirastós])

with evil (κακῶν [kakôn]) and he himself **tempts** (πειράζει [peiráze]) no one.

At first glance it appears that James 1:12–13 contradicts the verses above from the Torah. But the κακῶν (*kakôn*) “with evil” in the closing line of James 1:13 does double duty. It modifies the phrase which precedes it (“for God cannot be tempted *with evil*”) as well as the phrase which follows it (“he himself tempts no one [*with evil*]”) ”

Once Second Maccabees 7:1–42 is in focus the request, “Lead us not into testing, but deliver us from evil,” in Matthew 6:13 is much easier to understand. There is no underlying suggestion that God would ever entice a person to do what was evil; but there is a definite recognition that evil rulers can place devout and pious people between a “rock” and a “hard place.” The “rock” would be the guilt that followed anyone who—given the choice of saintly martyrdom or living as an infidel—ends up as a life-long infidel. The “hard place” would be the tortuous path leading to a martyr’s grave.

The petition in Matthew 6:13 may well have been a part of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane when he prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Moreover, the word πειρασμόν (*peirasmón*) “trial, test, temptation,” appears in Jesus’ repeated advice to the disciples who were with him in Gethsemane that night: “Watch and pray that you enter not into **temptation**” (γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν) (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 33:40, 46).

Assuming that Jesus spoke to his disciples in Hebrew, the Greek εἰσέλθητε (*eisélthēte*) “you enter” can be translated back into Hebrew as תבאו (*tb^cw*). When this original תבאו (*tb^cw*) was first translated into Greek it was mistakenly read as the active verb תבאו (*tābo^oû*) “you enter.” But it was really the passive verb תבאו (*tubā^oû*) “you will be brought.” Thus, the puzzling phrase “that you enter not into temptation” meant “that you not be brought to trial” (כִּי לֹא תִבְאוּ לְמִסָּה [kî lô^o tubā^oû lēmassāh]).

The very night in which Jesus was betrayed (Matt 26:47–50; Mark 14:66–72) Peter—in the courtyard of Caiaphas the high priest—faced an informal trial and was tested by maidens and bystanders who accused him of being “with the Nazarene, Jesus.” But Peter “began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know this man of whom you speak.’” Three times Peter was tempted and tested to tell the truth, but he failed the test every time. One can only speculate when Peter remembered to pray as Jesus taught him, “Lead me not into trials / testings, but deliver me from evil.”