

Misunderstanding The Lord's Prayer

Part Two: Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Overview

What does “lead us not into temptation” really mean? Matthew 6:13 becomes clearer when the Greek reveals the distinction between testing and temptation. Does “lead us not into temptation” mean God might lead people toward sin? James 1:13 rules out that reading, because James says God tempts no one. So why did Jesus teach it this way? The Greek preserves the sense of being brought or led into something, but the word translated “temptation” carries the broader sense of testing and proving. Is “temptation” a completely wrong translation? Not exactly. Πειρασμός (Peirasmos) primarily translates to “a trial,” “a test,” or “temptation,” and can include temptation in some contexts, but the problem arises when English reduces the word to a sin-enticing desire only. Does God test people? Scripture clearly shows testing, especially in wilderness patterns, but it also distinguishes testing from evil enticement. The Lord’s Prayer does not make God the tempter. It teaches a serious prayer about being spared from testing and trusting God for the way through when testing comes.

Summary

This section explains one of the most difficult lines in the Lord’s Prayer. If James says God tempts no one, why did Jesus teach us to pray this line? The answer begins with the Greek words behind “lead” and “temptation” and with the broader biblical pattern of testing, wilderness, and deliverance. This passage becomes clearer when the original wording is allowed to speak.

Matthew 6:13 becomes clearer when the English word “temptation” is examined in the Greek text. The verb εἰσφέρω (eisphero, a compound meaning “to bring in,” “to carry inward,” or “to lead into”) conveys the sense of bringing or leading into, so the difficult part of the prayer should not be softened too quickly. But the noun peirasmos has a wider range than a sin-only idea of temptation. It can refer to testing, trial, and proving. That is why James 1:13 does not contradict Jesus. God does not entice anyone toward evil, but Scripture shows people entering places of testing. Matthew 4:1 shows Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness, while the devil is the tempter. Luke 22:40 and 22:46 show Jesus warning His disciples not to enter peirasmos. Then 1 Corinthians 10:13 adds ἐκβάσις (ekbasis), which literally translates to “a way out,” “exit,” or “outcome.” It is derived from the combination of *ek* (meaning “out”) and *basis* (meaning “a stepping” or “a step”), and Matthew 6:13 closes with πονηρός (poneros), evil or the evil one. The verse says something more precise than many English readers realize.

An Examination of the Text

One of the most famous lines in the Lord's Prayer has been changed. For centuries, Christians prayed, "Lead us not into temptation." But in recent years, that line has become so controversial that some churches have changed the wording because it sounds as if God might lead people into temptation. That is not a small problem, because James says clearly, "God tempts no one." So now you have a real question in your own Bible. Why would Jesus teach us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," if Scripture also says God does not tempt anyone? The answer is not to attack the prayer, nor is it to pretend that the old wording was meaningless. The answer is in the Greek, but here is the uncomfortable part. The Greek verb really does mean "to bring" or "to lead into." That part does not disappear. The word that changes the line is the one translated as "temptation." Once you see what that word means, this prayer becomes sharper, heavier, and much clearer than the English makes it sound.

Before we "soften" the line, we have to understand why it changed. The modern controversy did not appear out of nowhere. In 2017, the French Catholic liturgy revised this line. Instead of a phrase that sounded like "do not submit us to temptation," the public wording shifted to "do not let us enter into temptation." Then, in 2019, the Italian Missal was approved with revised wording as well. The Italian line shifted to "do not abandon us to temptation." Different languages; same concern. The old line suggests that God might be leading a person into temptation. Many people understood the concern, because if a child asks what this line means, the simple answer can sound troubling. Why would Jesus tell us to ask the Father not to do something the Father should never do?

That is why some Christians welcomed the change. They felt the new wording protected God's goodness, but others pushed back. They pushed back because the Greek is not easily softened. The Greek does not simply say, "Do not let us fall." It says, "Do not bring us into." That means the problem cannot be solved by changing the verb too quickly. The text must be faced first, and that is the point of this section. This is not to attack Catholics or Protestants, nor to accuse translators of hiding something. The point is much simpler: Why did this line sound dangerous enough to change? And what did Jesus actually teach us to pray? To answer that, we have to place the Lord's Prayer beside one verse from James.

The Lord's Prayer says, "Lead us not into temptation." James says, "God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one." Can you feel the tension? One line can sound like Jesus is telling you to ask God not to lead you into temptation. The other line says God does not tempt anyone. So, which is it? The faithful answer is not to throw away either verse. Jesus is not confused, and James is not correcting Jesus. Scripture does not ask you to accept a moral contradiction in God. Unfortunately, English can make the contradiction feel stronger than it has to be. In modern English, the word temptation usually means "a pull toward sin, a lure, an enticement, and a desire trying to drag you into what is wrong." Therefore, when many readers hear, "Lead us not into temptation," they hear, "God, please do not lead me toward sin." That is the inherited reading, and it is understandable.

But if that is all the line means, James becomes a problem. He does not say, "God *usually* does not tempt people." He says *God tempts no one*. The old English line leaves the listener with a serious question about God's character. Would the Father ever lure His children toward evil? Jesus says to pray this line; James says God does not tempt. The way through is not to deny the tension. The way through is to ask where the English word has become too narrow. That starts with the verb.

The Greek verb in Matthew 6:13 is εἰσφέρω (eisphero). Its basic idea is to bring in, carry in, or lead into. That matters because many people want the solution to be easy; they want the line to mean, "Do not let us fall into temptation," as if God is simply watching from a distance and preventing a stumble. But the Greek verb is stronger than that. It does not first point to falling—it points to being brought in. That is why the old English wording is not foolish on this point. "Lead us not into" is uncomfortable, but it is not random. It is trying to carry the force of the verb. If someone says, "The old wording makes it sound like God brings people into temptation," the answer is not, "No, the Greek never says that." The harder answer is this. The Greek really does place God as the one being asked not to bring us into something. That is why the verse feels heavy. That is why the modern change happened. And that is why we should not resolve the line by making the verb disappear. The verb is not the escape hatch; it sharpens the problem. Jesus really taught His disciples to ask the Father, "Do not bring us into..." But into what? That is where the English word temptation must be opened. Because the correction is not hiding in eisphero. It is hiding in πειρασμός (peirasmos).

The word translated as "temptation" is peirasmos. Therefore, peirasmos is the key. This needs to be said carefully. Peirasmos can mean temptation in some contexts. It can describe a moment when evil is pulling at a person, and it can sit near the idea of enticement. The point is not that "temptation" is always a wrong translation; that would be too simple. The real point is that peirasmos is broader than our English word "temptation" usually suggests. Its field of meaning includes testing, trial, proving, and being put to the proof. That changes the line because, in common English, "temptation" makes you think of a sin trap. But peirasmos can make you think of a proving ground, and those are not the same thing. A trap is designed to make you fall, but a test reveals what is faithful, what is weak, what is ready, and what is not. This does not make the prayer softer. It makes it more serious.

Jesus is not merely teaching you to say, "Father, do not lure me into sin." James already tells you that God does not do that. Jesus is teaching you to pray about testing. And this is where the Hebrew background matters, too. The wilderness was not merely empty scenery in Scripture. Israel was tested in the wilderness. Massah was the place of testing, where the people put the Lord to the test and their own trust was exposed. When peirasmos carries the sense of trial and proving, it is not an abstract word-study detail; it belongs to the Bible's wilderness memory. The place where comfort is stripped away and trust is examined. The question becomes simple: "Will you remain faithful when the easy supports are gone?" That is why the footnote in your Bible says, "TEMPTATION?" The question mark matters, not because the word is useless, but because

English has collapsed a testing word into a single word. And once you see that, the next scene in Scripture becomes important because Jesus Himself was led into the wilderness.

Matthew 4 says Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. That sentence captures the whole distinction. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, but it is the devil who tempts Him there. Do not rush past that: The Spirit is not the tempter! The devil is the tempter. The Spirit simply led Jesus into the testing ground. That is why Matthew 4 matters so much for the Lord's Prayer. The thing Jesus teaches His disciples to pray about is not theoretical; He lived it, entered the wilderness, fasted, was pressured, and was confronted. He answered with Scripture; His fidelity was put to the proof. The text does not present God as the one whispering evil into His ear. The tempter does that. The testing ground is where the difference becomes visible. This is why the Lord's Prayer cannot be reduced to "Do not let me feel desire." It is much bigger than that. It is a prayer about being brought into the proving place, the wilderness, the pressure, the place where loyalty is tested, and the place where the enemy may tempt. But we must understand that God is not the source of evil.

Once you see Matthew 4, James begins to make more sense. God does not entice toward evil. But Scripture does show Spirit-led testing, and that distinction matters. If you collapse testing and enticement into the same English word, the Father starts to look like the tempter. But if you separate them, the text becomes clearer. The Father may bring a person to the place of proving, but it is the evil one who twists that proving into temptation. And Jesus knew this pattern so deeply that He repeated the warning in Gethsemane. In Luke 22, Jesus enters another kind of wilderness. Not sand this time, but Gethsemane, where He tells His disciples, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." The word is the same, *Peirasmos*. Pray that you may not be tested. This matters because Gethsemane is not a casual moment. The disciples are not simply being warned about a random bad habit. They are about to face fear, confusion, violence, betrayal, and the collapse of everything they thought was about to happen.

Their loyalty is about to be tested. Peter thinks he is ready. The others think they are stronger than they are, but Jesus sees the testing before they do. So He tells them to pray, not because God is about to lure them into evil, but because the hour of testing is near. And then the disciples sleep; they neither watch nor pray. When the pressure arrives, they scatter. That is *peirasmos* in action. A moment when what is hidden becomes visible, when intention meets pressure, and when the heart is not discussed in theory but proved in reality. So now the Lord's Prayer has two witnesses. The wilderness shows Jesus entering the testing. Gethsemane shows Jesus warning His disciples not to enter it. And with those two scenes in place, we can finally return to James, because James was not denying that testing exists. He was denying that God entices anyone toward evil. That is the categorical mistake the English creates. Once that mistake is removed, the contradiction begins to open.

James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God." Why? Because God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one. That verse is not weak; it is absolute. God is not the source of evil enticement, God is not whispering sin into you, and God is not trying to make you fall. However, James does not erase every idea of testing in

Scripture, and that is the difference. A test and an enticement are not the same thing. A test reveals fidelity; an enticement pulls toward evil, but a test can expose what is true. An enticement seeks to corrupt what is true. When those two ideas are flattened under one English word, the Bible seems to fight itself. But when the categories separate, the line begins to clear. Jesus can teach us to pray, "Do not bring us into peirasmos," and James can still say, "God tempts no one." The prayer is not accusing God of being the tempter. It is asking the Father not to bring us into the proving place. If we are brought there, the next question becomes urgent. What keeps the testing from becoming destruction?

That is where Paul provides the missing piece. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul uses the same word family. "No peirasmos has overtaken you but such as is common to man: and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the peirasmos, will provide the ekbasis also, so that you will be able to endure it" (NASB). That word ekbasis means the way out, the outlet, the way through. Now the shape of the prayer becomes clearer. This is not denial or comfort language. This is not pretending that pressure will never come. It is a serious prayer from within the Bible's own testing pattern. Do not bring us into the testing. And if the testing comes, do not leave us without a way through.

This is the moment when the whole line finally comes together. The verb remains strong. Eisphero still means to bring or lead into. The noun opens wider; peirasmos is not only a sin trap but also testing, trial, and proving:

- James guards God's character: God does not entice anyone toward evil.
- Matthew shows the testing ground: Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, but the devil is the tempter.
- Luke shows the warning: Pray that you do not enter peirasmos.
- Paul gives the promise: with the peirasmos comes the ekbasis.

Thus, the corrected meaning is not weak. It is not, "God would never bring you into anything difficult." Scripture does not say that. It is not, "Temptation was a bad English word and should be erased completely." That is too simple, too. The better reading is sharper: "Father, do not bring us into the testing. Do not bring us into the proving place where fidelity is exposed and evil can try to twist the pressure. And if we are there, be faithful in the testing. Limit it. Govern it. And show us the way through."

That is why the modern wording controversy matters. The concern was understandable. No faithful reader wants to make God the author of evil. But if the solution makes the verb too soft, it can lose the prayer's force. Jesus gave us something stronger than a vague request not to fall. He gave us a prayer about the threshold of testing itself. Do not bring us in. Do not let us enter the proving ground unguarded. Do not let the place of testing become the place where evil owns us. And this is why the line becomes more coherent with James, not less. James says God is not the tempter. The Lord's Prayer says to ask the Father not to bring you into testing. Paul says that if peirasmos comes, God remains faithful and provides the ekbasis. The Bible does not contradict itself. The English word was carrying too little of the Greek range. And the next line of the prayer proves that Jesus was holding testing and deliverance together.

The Lord's Prayer does not end with "lead us not into temptation." The next words are "but deliver us from evil." Or, as many render the Greek phrase, "from the evil one." The phrase is ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ (apo tou ponārou). Ponerous can mean evil, wicked, or the evil one, depending on how the phrase is understood. We need to speak carefully here. English translations differ. Some say evil, while others say the evil one. Either way, the movement of the prayer is clear. The two petitions belong together. Do not bring us into the peirasmos. Deliver us from ponerous. Do not bring us into the testing. Deliver us from evil, or from the evil one. Now Matthew 4 makes even more sense. Jesus is led into the wilderness. The devil tempts Him there. Testing and evil pressure meet in the same scene, but they do not come from the same source.

That is why the prayer is so precise. It does not say, "There will be no wilderness." It does not say, "There will be no pressure." It teaches you to ask the Father not to bring you into the testing, and to deliver you from the evil that tries to claim the testing ground. That is also why this line deserves its own companion study, because "deliver us from evil" is not just an ending phrase. It is the matched answer to peirasmos. The prayer moves from testing to deliverance; from the proving place to God's rescue; from the place where fidelity is exposed to the God who does not abandon His people there. And now the final question is practical. How do you pray this line now, once you know what the word is carrying? Do not make the line smaller. Make it clearer.

When you pray, "Lead us not into temptation," hear the weight of the Greek. Do not bring us into the testing. Do not bring us into the proving place. Do not let us enter the wilderness where pressure exposes what is weak and where evil tries to turn the trial into a fall. That is not a soft prayer; it is a sober prayer. And when pressure comes, name it carefully. This is peirasmos. This is a testing. This is a proving. That does not mean every painful thing is automatically sent by God. Do not overstate the point. But it does mean you do not have to misname every pressure as God tempting you. James will not allow that. God is not enticing you toward evil. God is not trying to corrupt you. God is not the tempter. So if the pressure is real, ask the next question Paul gives you. Where is the ekbasis? Where is the way through? It's not always an instant escape, nor is it always the removal of every hard thing. It's the way through, the faithful step.

The door that does not look dramatic but is open. The truthful choice. The prayer instead of panic. The refusal instead of surrender. The Scripture answers in the wilderness. The staying awake in Gethsemane. The next right movement when the pressure wants to own you. That is how the Lord's Prayer becomes practical without becoming self-help. It is not a technique. It is prayer shaped by the text. "Father, do not bring me into the testing. And if I am in the testing, do not let evil claim it. Show me the way through. Deliver me from evil. Deliver me from the evil one." Now the old line no longer has to sound like God might lure His children into sin. And the changed line no longer has to be treated as the only means of protecting God's goodness.

The Greek gives you a stronger answer. The verb remains uncomfortable. The noun becomes clearer. The contradiction with James is resolved. God does not tempt anyone toward evil. But Scripture knows the testing ground. Jesus entered it. The disciples were warned about it. Paul promised the way through it. When you hear the line now, hear it with its full weight. Lead us

not into peirasmos. Do not bring us into the testing. And if we stand in the place of proving, deliver us from poneros. This is why the Lord's Prayer deserves to be opened line by line, because this is not the only wording problem sitting inside the prayer.