

1 Corinthians 10:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

Analysis

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents—This verse references Numbers 21:5-6, where Israel spoke against God and Moses, despising the manna. God sent seraphim (fiery serpents) whose bites killed many Israelites. The verb *ekpeirazōmen* (ἐκπειράζωμεν, "tempt/test/put to the test") describes presumptuous testing of God's patience—pushing boundaries to see how much sin He'll tolerate.

Remarkably, Paul says they **tempted Christ** (some manuscripts read "the Lord"), identifying Christ as the One Israel provoked in the wilderness. This reinforces v. 4's assertion that Christ was present with Israel. To tempt Christ is to presume on His grace, to sin deliberately while counting on forgiveness, to treat His patience as permission.

The Corinthians **tempted Christ** by flirting with idolatry, reasoning that their knowledge and freedom permitted what God forbade. They tested whether participation in pagan worship would really bring judgment. Paul warns: Israel tried this, and serpents destroyed them. Don't presume Christ will tolerate what He judged before. Jesus lifted up on the cross (John 3:14) heals those bitten by sin's serpent, but this grace doesn't excuse deliberate rebellion.

Historical Context

The bronze serpent incident (Numbers 21) demonstrated both judgment and grace —God punished rebellion but provided healing for those who looked in faith to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up. Jesus used this as a type of His crucifixion (John 3:14-15). Paul's warning applies to those who abuse grace, treating Christ's sacrifice as license to sin.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. In what ways might you be "tempting Christ" by presuming on His patience with ongoing sin?
2. How can you maintain both confidence in God's grace and healthy fear of His holiness?
3. What boundaries has God established that you're tempted to test or cross?

Interlinear Text

μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν καθὼς καὶ τινες
Neither **let us tempt** G3588 **Christ** **as** **also** **some**
G3366 G1598 G5547 G2531 G2532 G5100

αὐτῶν ἐπείρασαν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ὄφεων ἀπώλοντο
of them **tempted** **also** **of** G3588 **serpents** **were destroyed**
G846 G3985 G2532 G5259 G3789 G622

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 78:18 (Parallel theme): And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.

Exodus 17:7 (Parallel theme): And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

Exodus 17:2 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?

Psalms 78:56 (Parallel theme): Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:

Deuteronomy 6:16 (Parallel theme): Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.

Psalms 106:14 (Parallel theme): But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.

Psalms 95:9 (Parallel theme): When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.