

Psalms 78:41

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

Analysis

Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. Šûb (שׁוב, "turned back") indicates deliberate reversal—not merely drifting but active turning away. Nāsâ (הִנֵּסֶת, "tempted") means to test or try, putting God on trial rather than trusting Him. They presumed to test their Judge—cosmic role-reversal.

The phrase qādôš Yisrâ'ēl hittâwû (קדוש ישראל התייאש, "limited the Holy One of Israel") uses tâwâ (תִּיאָשׁ), meaning to mark out boundaries or set limits. They attempted to circumscribe the infinite, dictate terms to sovereignty, restrict the One who transcends all limits. The title "Holy One of Israel" (used 30 times in Isaiah) emphasizes set-apartness and covenant relationship.

Human presumption reaches its zenith here: creatures limiting the Creator, demanding He prove Himself on their terms. This sin persists whenever we tell God how He must act, what He must provide, or when He must intervene—making ourselves sovereign and God our servant.

Historical Context

Specific instances include demanding meat (Numbers 11), testing whether God was among them at Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:7), and refusing to enter Canaan (Numbers 14). Each rebellion limited God by doubting His provision, presence, or power.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. In what ways might you be "limiting God" by demanding He work according to your expectations?
2. How does presuming to test God differ from exercising biblical faith that asks for His help?
3. What "boundaries" do you unconsciously place on God's power, wisdom, or goodness?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּשְׁבְּנָה	וַיַּעֲשֵׂה	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן	וְיָמָן
Yea they turned back	and tempted	God	the Holy One	of Israel	and limited						
H7725	H5254	H410	H6918	H3478	H8428						

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 14:22 (Parallel theme): Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

Acts 7:39 (Parallel theme): To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

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

Numbers 14:4 (Parallel theme): And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

2 Kings 19:22 (Holy): Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

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