

TEMPTATIONS & TRIALS

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How many of God's people have endured unthinkable terrors? We live in peaceful times while many brethren in times past suffered terrible torments that led to many deaths. Even the recent COVID-19, while a hardship for some, is not generally a threat to life. The prophets, apostles, and disciples of Christ all suffered adversities and privations but many of them were also tortured and killed for obeying God rather than men. This has also been the case for many of God's people since beginnings of the New Testament era. Recall the history of Albigenses, Waldensians, and the murder of thousands of so-called heretics by the Catholic Church. Persecution of God's people, especially in Europe, continued even after the discovery of the Americas, which became a place of refuge for Sabbath-keeping groups.

Who among us can imagine being a Christian during those times? The well-known *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* is a history of many terrible deaths at the hands of opponents to Christianity. Remember William Tyndale? He was among many that were burned at the stake for believing God's Word. The Bible also mentions a few of the horrors that the servants of God endured:

HEBREWS 11:36-37 And **others endured the trial of cruel mockings and scourgings**; yes, and moreover, of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were **stoned to death, they were sawed in two, they were brutally interrogated, and slaughtered by the sword**. They went about in sheepskins *and* in goatskins, being destitute, oppressed, *and* ill-treated;

No one can imagine horrors such as these. Paul lists some of the trials they endured, including temptations. What is the difference between trials and temptations? Trials are afflictions of fear, pain, suffering, loss, neediness, weakness, aloneness, rejection, betrayal, and doubt. Temptations, however, are tests of character and obedience. They require us to make a choice whether or not to put God first, even if it is hurtful to us. *Temptation* can also be rendered *testing*. The primary distinction is:

DEFINITION: A <i>trial</i> is an <u>affliction</u> while a <i>temptation</i> or test is <u>a situation wherein we have a choice</u> .
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Temptations and tests expose what is in our hearts and is a measure of our faith. When a temptation or test comes upon us, we must make a choice: we can turn to God or away from God.

Abraham was tested (not tried) when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. When Abraham chose to obey it was then that God said, "... **[N]ow I know that thou fearest God**, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me." (Genesis 22:12). Tests also show us what is in our hearts. For instance, courage can only be demonstrated under conditions that produce fear; likewise, obedience to God is manifested when we are tested or tempted to turn away from Him.

JAMES 1:12-15 **Blessed is the man who endures trials** because, after he has been proved, he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Do not let anyone who is tempted say, "I am being tempted by God" because God is not tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one *with evil*. 14 But **each one is tempted when he is drawn away and is enticed by his own lust**. 15 And **after lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is completely finished, brings forth death.

God never tempts us with evil. God always tests our obedience. It is Satan that tempts us by appealing to our lusts, which is why he is called the Tempter. Notice the distinction: God tests us and Satan tempts us. The word used for both is the same and so the proper rendering is determined by the context.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:5 For this reason, when I could not wait any longer, I sent *Timothy*, in order to know your faith, lest perhaps the **tempter [Satan] had tempted** you, and our labor might be in vain.

Let us be clear: tests from God are not evil against us but to test and prove our obedience as in the case with Abraham, whereas lustful temptations are of Satan. **Lust is the desire for that which God has defined as sin**. If there is no lust in us then we cannot be tempted with evil. If we succumb to temptations then it becomes sin. This is why Jesus is our perfect High Priest: He overcame all the evil temptations of Satan. Jesus Christ was tested when He willingly suffered as our Passover. All of us are tested by God and all of us are tempted by Satan.

Certainly, we should always pray when tests come upon us as they are our only protection against temptation:

MATTHEW 26:41 Watch and **pray, so that you do not enter into temptation**; the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh is weak.

Jesus overcame temptation by spending *much* time in prayer to God. Likewise, if God is not first in our lives, we cannot resist Satan's temptations (James 4:7). In the parable of the sower, it is **temptation** causes some to fall away:

LUKE 8:13 And those *that fell* upon the rock are the ones who, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; but these do not have any root, who believe *only* for a while, and **in time of trial fall away**.

Temptation can also come in the form of judging others for their weaknesses. If we do, we may find ourselves likewise tempted; instead, we must love others by helping them:

GALATIANS 6:1 Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in some offense, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.**

It is through choosing obedience to God that we are able to bear the temptations and tests in this life. Unlike trials, God promises a way to escape temptations that become unbearable.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-14 Therefore, let the one who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. 13 **No temptation has come upon you** except what is common to mankind. For **God, Who is faithful, will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear; but with the temptation, He will make a way of escape [literally, an exit],** so that you may be able to bear *it*. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Many have applied this verse to trials of testing but it is specific to temptations that come upon us because they are “common to mankind”. Notice that Paul does **not** say that we will be entirely freed from a temptation but rather that God will deliver us from that which becomes unbearable. This usually comes *after* we make the decision to turn to God and resist Satan. This is the importance of verse 14, which says to “flee from idolatry”. The last sentence starts with “therefore”, which implies God's help is conditional. We have two choices: flee from idolatry or run after it. If we resist Satan, then God will help us bear the temptation. In other words, **God limits the evil Satan intends to do to us.**

So why do James and Peter tell us to count it **joy** when we are tested? Because we are choosing God and denying Satan. We know that we are truly the children of God if He tests us or allows Satan to tempt us because God wants to prove all His children. Satan, on the other hand, hates those who are God's.

1 PETER 1:6-7 In this **you yourselves greatly rejoice [be FULL of joy]; though for the present, if it is necessary, you are in distress for a little while by various trials [tests];** 7 In order that the proving of your faith, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is being tested by fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at *the* revelation of Jesus Christ;

All temptations and tests prove whether or not we are found worthy of eternity with God. What greater hope is there? Therefore, if we choose obedience to God when tested and flee temptations we are actually praising, honoring, and glorifying *God*. For us, temptations and tests produce patience as we wait upon God in faith for deliverance:

JAMES 1:2-3 **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you are beset by various trials,** 3 Knowing that the testing [*testing for genuineness as with a gold or silver coin*] of your faith produces endurance [*patient endurance, constancy*].

Finally, God promises to keep us from the **temptations** that are to come upon the whole world if we obey and patiently endure:

REVELATION 3:10 Because you have kept the word of My patience [*G5278 = patient endurance, constancy*], **I also will keep you from the time of temptation [of Satan and the Beast] which is about to come upon the whole world** to try those who dwell on the earth.

God tests all His children to see if we are truly seeking to please Him. He allows Satan to tempt us so that the obedience of our hearts is manifested under duress. These things tell us much about ourselves and increase our faith or show us weaknesses that must be overcome:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:17-19, 21-24 **Pray unceasingly. 18 Give thanks in everything**, for this *is the* will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 19 **Quench not the Spirit**. ... 21 Prove all things. Hold fast *to that which* is good. 22 Abstain from every form of wickedness. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your entire spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful *is He* Who calls you, Who will also perform *it [preserve blameless the saints]*.