

## ***Is there a difference in trials, tribulations, and temptations? What causes each?***

“Is there a difference in trials, tribulations, and temptations? What causes each?” Each of these words carries a different meaning; and the context in which they are used sometimes influences their meaning. A close look at the words in context brings clarity to their different meanings. The citation here will be from the New International Version (NIV). If you do not have the NIV, you will find it online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions> .

**Let us begin with *trials*.** *Merriam-Webster Online* defines *trial(s)* as a test of faith, patience, or stamina through subjection to suffering or temptation. In Luke 22:28-30, the Lord was clearly talking of his suffering since the time of his betrayal was upon him, “28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials . 29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” These same trials come up in the lives of Christians, and in 1 Thess 3:2-4, Paul relates them to persecutions: “Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials . You know quite well that we were destined for them. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.”

James teaches that trials are of many kinds—perhaps, physical suffering, mental doubts, or spiritual faltering—all of which test our faith. We must face these trials to persevere and persevere to be mature and complete. He wrote in James 1:2-4, “2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” In a parallel passage, Peter taught a similar idea by comparing the suffering that comes from trials as proving our faith. In 1 Peter 1:6-7, he taught, “6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials . 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

God is able to rescue the godly from their trials, according to 2 Peter 2:9, “9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

**Now let us look at *tribulations*.** Again, according to *Merriam-Webster*, *tribulation(s)* is distress or suffering resulting from oppression or persecution. In the NIV, the word, *tribulations* (plural), does not appear, indicating that it is not used much in our time. The NIV uses the word, *tribulation* (singular) once in the Revelation. A study of how the New King James Version (NKJV) uses *tribulations* is useful in understanding its meaning. If you do not have the NKJV, may go online and see <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions> . Acts 14:22 uses *tribulations* in the NKJV; however, the NIV used *hardships*, “They went down to Attalia. 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.” NIV

Another example is Rom 5:3, which says *tribulations* in the NKJV but *sufferings* in the NIV, “3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.” But in 2 Thess 1:4, the NIV uses *persecutions* for the NKJV *tribulations*, “4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” The meaning of tribulations by use in these passages is *suffering, hardships, and persecution*.

The meaning of *tribulations* and *trials* are differentiated in that the sufferings, hardships, and persecution (*tribulations* in NKJV) try us or bring us to trial.

**Finally, there are *temptations*.** Trials, hardships, tribulations and persecutions present our minds and

bodies with temptations to sin. According to Merriam-Webster, temptation is the state of being tempted, especially to evil. James explains exactly how this happens in James 1:12-15,

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Notice that verse 12 is talking about persevering under trial and standing the test. Verses 13-15 describe how temptation unfolds, ending in sin and death. The Bible offers two excellent examples of how enticement brings temptation, temptation brings trial, and succumbing to temptation brings sin, while overcoming temptation and its trial conquers sin. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were enticed by the serpent. Gen 3:1-7 reads:

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The serpent tried the woman, and she was enticed by wanting to be like God. Her evil desire took over, for the tree was good to eat, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom. John describes these very same elements of temptation in 1 John 2:16-17: "16 For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." This enticement of the world is evident in the example of Eve.

The Lord was similarly enticed in his trial in the wilderness. Matt 4:1-11 explains:

4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus escaped his trials by rejecting the devil's appeal to the craving for food ("turn these stones into bread"). He rejected the enticement to demonstrate that he was the son of God ("If you are the son of God"). He rejected the lust of his eyes ("he showed him all the kingdoms of the world").

In both of these cases, trials came by the way of temptation.

**In summary, when you are tried and tempted, God will give you a way out.** In 1 Cor 10:13, Paul teaches, "13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."