

## **Trials in Three Lights** **By Patrick Swayne**

Sometimes when studying only an English version of the Bible it can be easy to overlook the point a Biblical author is trying to make by using a particular word. Such is the case in the book of James when one comes across the word “tempt.” In the King James Version, the reader is told by James to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” but then is told, “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:3, 14). It would be easy to jump to an improper conclusion – namely, that one should rejoice when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. However, when one digs deeper into the text by using a lexicon or other reference work, one finds that James originally used two words that naturally divided his discussion. The word temptation in 1:1-12 would be more properly translated as trials (as it is in several newer versions), while the word tempt in 1:13-15 carries the idea of temptation to sin. This solves one dilemma, but presents another: James is telling his readers to be joyful... in trials?

While the command may seem somewhat strange, it represents only one of three ways that trials are presented in the Bible – namely, as a **blessing**. In making this statement, James is merely expanding upon what Christ said in the opening words of perhaps His greatest sermon, in which He stated that those who faced trials were “blessed” (literally happy), were to “rejoice,” and were to be “exceeding glad” (Matthew 5:10-12). While Christ’s discussion centered upon trials earned in righteous service, James statement seems to envelop every peril that man faces – from persecution to physical pain. James is clear to present the blessing of trials – they produce patience (literally steadfastness), and allow one to be perfect (literally complete) (James 1:3-4). One is reminded of Job, who said, “When He has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (Job 23:10 ESV).

The mortal side of any Bible student though is glad to learn of another light into which the Bible places trials: as a **burden**. In one of the Psalms, for instance, the author feels so distressed by outward trials that he utters this inspired statement, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” a sentiment that would be both felt and quoted by Christ on the cross (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46). Trials certainly can leave man feeling at times as though God has left him, but careful consideration (often in hindsight) reveals that God was there all along. When one woman screamed at a preacher, “Where was God when my son died,” the preacher responded, “The same place He was when His Son died.” The Psalmist who felt forsaken by God would later say, “He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the

afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard” (Psalm 22:24). No faithful servant of the Lord is ever truly alone to carry his burden, as God carries it with him – even Christ said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit” (Luke 23:46).

To transcend the natural reaction that humans have to view trials as burdens instead of blessings, it is important to consider trials in a third Biblical light: as the means of producing great **breakthroughs**. Some would consider it odd that one of the greatest letters ever written on the subject of joy would be penned by a man held as a prisoner, and yet Philippians was written under these very circumstances. Paul realized that his imprisonment had opened doors for the spread of the gospel: “the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). Trials placed Paul in a wonderful straight – between Christian service and heaven (v. 23-24). Such is true of any faithful Christian – trials endured will open doors either to greater service on earth or the gift of heaven and eternal life.

When one considers the subject of trials in its full Biblical light, one can find in them great blessings, as it is often under the greatest burden that one achieves the greatest breakthroughs. Athletes tear down their muscles through grueling physical labor, only to be rebuilt stronger; trees endure terrible storms, storms that wiggle trees’ roots and allow for deeper growth. The Christian cannot be complete without trials; as one successfully endures them, one begins to understand both James’ command and his connection of the subject of trials with the subject of temptations. Trials can certainly be tempting, but overcoming trials allows one to be strong in the face of temptations and more fruitful in the fight against Satan. This truly is cause for great joy.