

The Refiner's Fire

The Birdcage

Lesson #3 for October 20, 2007

Scriptures: Exodus 14; 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Proverbs 3; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Peter 1:6-9.

1. Try to imagine yourself in the place of God the night He led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Make a list of the things that you would consider very important that you needed to teach them almost immediately. How closely did God follow your list?
2. How many of the things on your list do you think could be taught simply by instructing them? How many do you think would require actual experience?
3. Why do you think God kept testing Israel? Reading the context seems to suggest that they were doubting and faithless. Did that apply to everyone?
4. It appears from Scripture—and Ellen White confirms—that rebellion was often instigated among the “mixed multitude” who followed the children of Israel out of Egypt. Why did the children of Israel allow themselves to be led astray by that group? Why did God allow that group of rebels to be with His children and corrupt them?
5. Did God know that the children of Israel needed a lot of testing and trials in order to become a “faithful people”? Why did God lead His people into testing? Did they really need it? (Exodus 15:26) Name some examples of people who apparently went through experiences in which they were tested by God? Can you name some biblical characters who were clearly led into difficulties, trials, even painful suffering by God? What about Jacob, Miriam, Job, Ezekiel, Daniel, Daniel’s three friends, Jeremiah, and Jesus?
6. What is implied by Proverbs 3:12, “The Lord corrects those He loves”? (Compare Deuteronomy 8:15; Job 5:17; Hebrews 12:5,6) This seems to be a repeated refrain in Scripture. What does “correction” include?
7. Why did God lead the children of Israel into an apparently dead-end road facing the Red Sea as they were leaving Egypt? What was God trying to teach them through that experience? Did they actually learn anything? (Exodus 14:31; 15:1-18) Has God ever led you into an apparent dead end?
8. Do trials and troubles ever lead us to become stronger? Do we need polishing?
9. Often, probably unthinkingly, we assume that only good things will come from God. Conversely, we assume that all bad things must come from Satan!
10. Does God ever promise us—or even guarantee us—a blissful Christian life?
11. Does God want us always to be happy? Do trials ever lead to happiness?
12. Was Jesus happy? How much of His life was filled with trials, temptations, accusations, misrepresentations, etc.? What is the real source of happiness?
13. If you are having difficulties in your life, is there a way to know *for sure* whether you have wandered away from God’s leading or whether He is leading you on a

“detour”?

14. Have you ever been through a difficult trial and come out a better Christian on the other end?
15. Think back over the experiences of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Why do you think God generously supplied water and food most of the time but on a few occasions did not? Didn't they really need food and water? Those are not luxury items! What was God trying to teach them through those experiences? If you had been among them, would you have questioned whether or not God was guiding? The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire was still ahead of them!
16. Review Luke 4:1-13 and Matthew 4:1-11. Did God lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? Did the devil wait to tempt Jesus until the end of the 40 days? If so, what was Jesus doing during those forty days? What was the real purpose of those temptations? Or even of the wilderness experience?
17. How many other people in this world's history have lived for any period of time without sinning? Satan thought of himself as completely victorious here on this earth.
18. Was Jesus in some way protected during His childhood and youth from overwhelming temptations by the devil? Did the devil think of those wilderness temptations as his opportunity to finally really “get at” Jesus? Was that experience in the desert the first clear defeat for Satan in the history of this earth? What about Job? What weapons did Jesus use against the devil? What weapons do you use? What lessons should we learn?
19. What is it that makes temptations so attractive? What is the usual source of our temptations? (James 1:13-15) If God is the one who led Jesus into the wilderness where He was finally tempted by the devil, was that a case in which God and the devil were cooperating? (*The Desire of Ages* 126,127)
20. Do you think any of your temptations are as severe as those which Jesus experienced? Does the fact that Jesus survived those temptations, and in fact never sinned throughout His life, make it easier for you not to sin? Is Satan now recognized as a defeated foe? By humans? By the onlooking universe? Does it help you in times of temptation to know that Jesus is willing to “bear” your sins?
21. What real temptations are you facing now? How can you ask God to help you overcome them?
22. Sometimes, it seems when we are tempted that God does not respond to our prayers. That was certainly the impression Job had. Does God ever hide Himself? What about Job's case? Jesus in Gethsemane? On Calvary?
23. What do we know about God's plan for our lives and for the church as a whole? Does God have a plan which is clear in His mind which always works out the way He knows it is going to and the way He would like it to? Did God plan for a 2000 year delay before the second coming? Did God plan to wait at least 163 years after 1844? (*Evangelism* 694-697)
24. Do you ever dare to question whether God really knows what He is doing in the way He is leading you? Does God have a very specific plan for your life? Have you ever felt that God was leading you only to discover that the “water” was

“bitter”? (Exodus 15:22-26)

25. Think of the times during the era of the New Testament in which Peter was writing. Very likely, he was in prison facing execution. He wrote to his friends and fellow Christians in western Turkey and suggested that they might be facing some troubles! What kind of troubles was Peter thinking about that people were facing at that point in time?
26. In modern times, try to imagine yourself living under the darkest days of communism. Would you have survived? Would you have felt like a refugee? Would you have felt that you were being persecuted? Would you be a better Christian?
27. What did Peter mean when he suggested that his readers were receiving salvation which was the purpose of their faith? (1 Peter 1:6-9) How does that fit with Mark 10:30,31? What is the relationship between persecution, faith, and salvation?
28. Christians tend to relate to the world in one of three ways:
 - 1) They are “in the world and of the world.” If one were observing them from a distance, it would be difficult to tell that there is any difference between them and the world.
 - 2) Christians can be “in the world but not of the world.” That would suggest that while they live in this world, their thoughts and their actions are largely governed by principles from another world.
 - 3) Some Christians are “neither in the world nor of the world”! They want to do everything possible to keep themselves separate from anything going on in our world. They do not want to be contaminated!
29. Which one of these three categories best fits you? How would a person in each of these categories respond to a “crucible experience” from God?
30. Peter seemed to suggest that we could actually rejoice in our troubles. What could possibly be a reason for rejoicing in troubles?
31. When you are facing a severe trial or temptation in your life, do you find the promises of God in Scripture to be helpful? Why, or why not?
32. Does God intend for the Christian’s life to be a roller coaster?
33. Is it essential that every Christian be tried and tested before he or she can come forth pure? Explain your answer.
34. Do trials, temptations, and troubles here in this life somehow better prepare us for the future life? There will not be trials, temptations, or troubles in that life!

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Last modified: August 27, 2007

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