

The Refiner's Fire Extreme Heat

Lesson #5 for November 3, 2007

Scriptures: Gen. 22; Job 1:6-2:10; Isaiah 43:1-7; Hosea 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 11:23-29.

1. While God promises not to test us more than we are able to bear, (1 Corinthians 10:13) does it sometimes seem like He has gone past that limit? This lesson discusses extreme examples of testing by God. Think of Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac; Hosea being asked to marry a prostitute and then somehow win her back; Job losing everything; Paul going through all of the troubles that he willingly went through to spread the gospel; and Jesus Himself going through those last 24 hours. Have you had any experiences like those?
2. Look at Isaiah 53:10. Are there times when it “pleases” God to “bruise” us? In this context, it is important to understand that the word “please” does not mean that God is happy about it! Rather, the word “please” is used in the sense of God’s will. We know that use of the word in court when the lawyer says, “If it please the court...” The *Good News Bible* translates it, “It was my will that he should suffer.”
3. The “extreme heat” that we might expect in the near future will be the final events of this earth’s history. The 144,000 are those who will manage to survive through that “extreme heat.” Why has God asked those people, the weakest of His children, to go through those extreme situations? Does He risk losing some of us? If one of God’s apparently faithful children should give up under “extreme heat,” is it God’s fault?
4. Does the experience that the 144,000 will go through make them more like Jesus? How would that actually work? Are they just commiserating with each other? Is Jesus closer to them because they have suffered as He suffered?
5. Read Genesis 22. How do you think Abraham became so familiar with God’s voice that he could wake up in the middle of the night and be certain that God was speaking to him? Would God ever consider asking one of His children to do such a thing today?
6. Why was Abraham asked to go through that very difficult trial?

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but **it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God’s promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.** {PP 154.3}

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command

to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. **All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.** {PP 155.1}

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac--then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12. {PP 155.2}

7. If Abraham had not lied about his wife twice, (Gen.12:19; 20:2) would he still have been asked to go through this trial? What did the onlooking universe learn about Abraham, about God, and about their friendship from this trial?
8. God knew from the beginning exactly what He planned to do with Abraham. So why did He take Abraham through this trial? Was the trial just a charade?
9. Ellen White states that Abraham struggled through this trial, not sleeping for three days and three nights. (ST, Apr. 1, 1875) How many times did he question whether or not God's voice had been real? **Do these types of trial with "extreme heat" only come when major issues in the great controversy are involved?**
10. After being Christians for years and studying God's Word, we believe that we understand what He would do and why He would do it. How do we respond when God seems to ask us to do something which seems to be completely out of character? If we should be among those lucky few who will be chosen to be members of the 144,000, would we need to develop a clearer understanding of God's voice? Will God ask us to do things that seem to be unreasonable? Would God ever ask us to kill someone? Does God ever ask His children to do something that might seem on the surface to be immoral?
11. Consider your own personal relationship with God. What factors keep you from obeying Him and following Him 100%? Have you ever been afraid of what God might ask you to do? Have you ever felt that God has abandoned you? Abraham experienced God in the form of a human being. They sat together and had a meal together, probably on more than one occasion. Is that how he came to know God's voice so well? Is God's voice unlike any other?
12. Does God ever enjoy making us suffer? If not, why does He do it?
13. Try to imagine yourself in the position of Hosea! Hosea was apparently a faithful follower

of God. He may have even functioned as a “pastor.” Why would God ask such a person to marry a prostitute? Read Hosea 4:11-19. Is it possible that Gomer was the best young woman available in Hosea’s community?

14. Read Hosea 2:1-12. Clearly, it is God’s intention for us to understand the story as a parallel or parable of His relationship to the children of Israel. Hosea was living just a few years before the Assyrians wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel.
15. Look at the methods God suggested for Hosea to win his wife back! Imagine asking your children to plead with their mother to come home! Could you put a fence around your wife to try to keep her from wandering? Could you take away all her possessions in order to keep her from straying? What is implied by the statement, “I will strip her naked in front of her lovers, and no one will be able to save her from my power”? (Hosea 2:10, *GNB*)
16. Would God ever deprive us of our basic necessities or even embarrass us to try to get us to come back? How often do we embarrass Him? Can we know for sure that God is working through those experiences to improve us? How easy is it to misunderstand God when He does things like that? Was it experiences like that which led Paul to write in Romans 8:28, “In all things God works for good...”?
17. Read Hosea 2:14-23. Hosea tried to win his wife back with words of love. Was that possible? What does it tell us about God’s relationship to Israel?
18. How often are our troubles brought on by our own departure from God’s guidance? How often are our troubles brought on by temptations by the Devil? How often do our lives say something important in the great controversy as we struggle, with God alongside, through our trials?
19. Review the experience of Job 1 & 2. It is hard for us to imagine a “conference” taking place in heaven with God and the Devil discussing the degree of “heat” that one of God’s children here on planet Earth can survive! We know what the result was in the case of Job.
20. Does God ever talk about us in the councils of heaven? Why? Or why not? We have noted that the case of Abraham and the case of Job were special issues in the great controversy. Will the experience of the 144,000 be like that of Job? If we were to suffer a significant trial right now, would we respond by rejecting God and becoming bitter and angry, or would we hang on to God even tighter?
21. Could we respond as Job did? Notice the three ways in which Job responded in Job 1:20,21. He recognized that all of his wealth and even his children were given to him by God. Despite everything, he recognized that God was still in control, and he reasserted his belief in God’s fairness and righteousness. Do we ever think like that when trials hit us?
22. Considering Job’s total experience, what was his greatest trial? Was it the loss of his wealth? The loss of his children? Or the bad theology of his friends?
23. Notice especially where Job’s friends got their ideas: 1) From disquieting dreams “inspired” by the Devil himself! (Job 4:13-17) 2) From traditional ideas, (Job 8:8) and 3) From personal opinion. (Job 11:5,6) Are those reliable sources of information about God and His activities?
24. Look at the story of Paul’s experiences as recorded in 2 Corinthians 11:21-29. Would you be willing to suffer through those kinds of experiences to witness for God in a remote part of the world today? Might God ask us to do that? How well would you do through shipwrecks, stonings, imprisonments, floggings, bandit raids, lack of sleep and food, and a host of other trials?

25. Where did Paul get the strength and ability to look at all these troubles and see in them a reason to rely more fully on God? (2 Corinthians 1:8,9)
26. Paul saw them as an opportunity not only to rely more fully on God but also to encourage others to do the same! (2 Corinthians 1:4) Did God literally comfort Paul in his sufferings? How did that take place?
27. Do we need to be “hurting” in order to recognize our need for God? As we live our posh, comfortable lives, is it hard for us to sympathize with the experiences discussed in our lesson for today? Paul seemed to suggest that he was able to remain firmly in God’s camp because of God’s proven track record, his determination to fix his concentration on God Himself, and the continual prayers of his friends—whom he called “saints.” (2 Corinthians 1:10,11)
28. Thinking through the experiences described in our lesson, what do they teach us about God? Does God seem more like a tyrant—or even a bully—than a close friend? Is it always possible to understand exactly why God is doing what He is apparently doing?
29. Read again the famous words in Isaiah 43:1-7. Do these sayings seem fair? Was God playing favorites? Is He playing favorites now?
30. Let us never forget that these “crucible” experiences of “extreme heat” are not for the purpose of destroying us but rather of removing our sin from us. Secondly, the purpose is not to make us miserable but to make us pure. Thirdly, no matter how bad it gets, let us never forget that God really loves us. Those who seemed to understand Him and love Him the most went through the worst trials.
31. Look at these bits of consolation as reported in Scripture: Psalms 103:13,14; Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 1:7. We may need to be tested but God promises always to be by our side.
32. In light of eternity, I am sure it will be possible to recognize that God honored His greatest friends in Scripture—and thereafter—by allowing them to go through great trials not just for their own benefit, not just for their own purification, but so that they might say something about their relationship with God to the onlooking universe. Are you willing to be God’s real friend—even through trials?

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