

In the Crucible with Christ

The Crucibles That Come

Lesson #2 for July 9, 2022

Scriptures: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:8-11; Romans 1:21-32; Jeremiah 9:7-16; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

1. Continuing our study “In the Crucible with Christ,” we see this:

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] A **crucible** is defined in the dictionary as (1) a vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (2) **a severe test**, or (3) **a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development**.

These definitions also give us a helpful insight into what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we’ll highlight some reasons we may suddenly **find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests in places in which circumstances cause us to change, develop, and grow in character**.

This will help to give us an awareness of what God is doing in our lives so that when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of how to respond.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, July 2.^{††} [Is it always obvious when we are “going into a crucible”?][‡]

2. How comfortable are Christians, living in the Western world these days? How many of them are suffering persecution? While we do know that there are areas where Christians are being persecuted and killed, things are quite comfortable in the Western world.
3. Of course, there are events taking place that surprise us and which are unfortunate: Auto accidents, losses including financial and health losses, and even betrayals by someone we trusted. How should Christians prepare themselves for whatever comes?

1 Peter 4:12: My dear friends, **do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you**.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 Peter 4:12). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{††}

4. So, what are these “fiery ordeals” (*NIV, NRSV*) or “fiery trials” (*NKJV*) or “painful tests” (*GNB*) that Peter was talking about? When Jesus chose His disciples, did any of them have even the faintest idea that they would end up as martyrs?
5. Think about the times in which the early apostles lived. To be a Christian became a crime punishable by death. Yet, they went about convincing people that being a Christian was the right thing to do and converting them. Christians were crucified; Christians were beheaded; Christians were burned at the stake in that 1st century. What do you think attracted people to Christianity in the early years?
6. So, what did Peter say about all this? He said, “Be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings!” (1 Peter 4:13, *GNB**) Of course, Peter was talking about the second coming. Many things will be suddenly changed when that glorious event happens.
7. Have you ever wondered, as Job did, why evil people seem to grow and prosper while good people or Christians struggle?

[BSG:] Many of us are surprised about suffering because we often have an oversimplified view of the Christian life. We know there are two sides—God, who is good; and Satan, who is bad. But often, we then automatically put everything that feels good in the box with God and everything that feels bad in the box with Satan. But life is not so simple. **We cannot use our feelings to decide what is in God’s box or Satan’s box.** Sometimes walking with God can be challenging and hard. And following Satan can appear to bring great rewards. Job, who is righteous yet suffering, illustrates this when he asked God, “ ‘Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?’ ” (*Job 21:7, NIV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, July 3.^{†§}

8. But, not all trials come just because we are Christians. The greatest and most serious trials come because of Satan!

1 Peter 5:8: Be alert, be on the watch! **Your enemy, the Devil, roams round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

9. How can we prepare ourselves for the Devil’s attacks? We cannot see him; but, we know that he is a very successful tempter!
10. For those of us who have had experience seeing lions attack and eat a victim, it is very gruesome. Satan’s very existence is described like that! Should it be?
11. First Peter 5:8-11 talks about Satan’s attacks but also assure us that God—who calls us to unite ourselves with Christ—will protect us. How does He do that?

1 Peter 5:8-11: ⁸ Be alert, be on the watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Be firm in your faith and resist him, because you know that your fellow-believers in all the world are going through the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ But after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who calls you to share his eternal glory in union with Christ, will himself perfect you and give you firmness, strength, and a sure foundation. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever! [*sic*] Amen.—*Good News Bible.*†*

12. It is always best to think of our lives in the context of the larger, great-controversy battle between Satan and God, starting with the war of ideas which began in heaven until the final destruction of evil at the third coming. **Viewed in that context, we know that God has already won. And He is waiting for us to join His side.** Does God tell us specifically what we need to do to prepare ourselves?
13. Our world is full of sin. We are surrounded by it—whether we want to be or not—unless we live in isolation somewhere. After his initial greetings in Romans 1, Paul talked about the normal condition of the Romans and other pagans that lived around him. It was awful. And he did not waste time in saying that God’s “wrath” will be poured out against all such people. What does that mean?
14. Notice specifically that the main sin he mentioned concerned those whose “evil ways prevent the truth [about God] from being known.”[‡] Are we ever responsible for preventing the truth from being known? Romans 1 goes on to describe *God’s wrath* in very specific terms. Romans 1:24,26,28 tell us that God hands over or delivers over or turns away from

the people who commit the sins described in those verses. Romans 1 has one of the most extensive lists of sins in the entire Bible.

Romans 1:24-32: ²⁴ And so God has **given those people over** to do the filthy things their hearts desire, and they do shameful things with each other.

²⁵They exchange the truth about God for a lie; they worship and serve what God has created instead of the Creator himself, who is to be praised for ever! [*sic*] Amen.

²⁶ Because they do this, God has **given them over** to shameful passions....

²⁸ Because those people refuse to keep in mind **the true knowledge about God, he has given them over** to corrupted minds, so that they do the things that they should not do.... ³²They know that God's law says that people who live in this way deserve death. Yet, not only do they continue to do these very things, but they even approve of others who do them.—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

15. **We need to remember that God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.**
16. So, what should God do with sinners who repeatedly refuse to respond to His wooing? Finally, He must let them go or hand them over to their own decisions and their own devices. **God will never use force on us even to get us to do what is right.**
17. What about God's health laws? Our bodies are supposed to be the temples of God. Do we treat them like that? How many people in our world are destroying themselves by practicing evil habits?
18. There are times when God needs to deal with His people in order to produce the purification necessary before He can take them to heaven.

Jeremiah 9:7: Because of this the LORD Almighty says,

"I will refine my people like metal

and put them to the test.

My people have done evil—

what else can I do with them?"—*Good News Bible*.*†

[BSG:] "If the Spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you can be sure that there is something in you that He wants to hurt to the point of its death."—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 271.—[as quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, July 6].‡§

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the**

family of heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 315.1; *God's Amazing Grace** 148.4. (1900).^{†‡}

19. Are there times when God seems to use force if we are too immature to understand the truth? God has a very specific reason for testing and purifying His children. He wants to take as many of them as possible home to live with Him forever. But, He cannot admit to heaven people who would just continue the evils that exist here on earth. Notice the explanation God gave to Jeremiah about why He was doing that.

Jeremiah 9:13-14: ¹³The LORD answered, “**This has happened because my people have abandoned the teaching that I gave them. They have not obeyed me or done what I told them.** ¹⁴Instead, they have been stubborn and have worshipped the idols of Baal as their ancestors taught them to do.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. Can you remember a time when God revealed to you the necessity of eliminating some sin from your life? Was that comfortable? There are three reasons why that process may be uncomfortable.

[BSG:] **First**, we experience pain as God allows circumstances to bring our sin to our attention. A little earlier, Jeremiah unhappily writes, “ ‘The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out’ ” (*Jer. 6:29, NIV*). Thus, sometimes drastic action is needed in order to get our attention. **Second**, we experience anguish as we feel sorrow for the sin we now see clearly. **Third**, we experience frustration as we try to live differently. It can be quite uncomfortable and difficult to keep choosing to give up the things that have been so much a part of us.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, July 6.^{†‡§}

21. What would you say are the common sins of Seventh-day Adventists in 2022? Do we dare to talk about that? How can we turn away from those sins? What might God need to do to help us eliminate those sins from our lives?
22. Paul had what he called a *thorn in the flesh*. Do we know what that was? He begged God to take it away from him on three occasions; but, God finally essentially said: “No! Don’t mention that any more to Me. That thorn is there to help you develop character!” Could any of us have a thorn in the flesh in our day?
23. An interesting illustration that might help us to understand that is as follows:

[BSG:] **There is a big difference between cutting down and pruning. We cut down plants that we don’t want anymore; we prune plants that we want to develop into greater fruitfulness. Both processes, however, do involve a sharp knife. Indeed, pruning requires cutting parts off the plant that might seem to a novice gardener like destroying it. In a spiritual context, Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God’s superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son?**

“If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears.”—*Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

People have wondered what Paul actually meant by a “thorn in my flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7, NIV).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, July 7.^{†§}

[EGW:] **Paul had a bodily affliction; his eyesight was bad.** He thought that by earnest prayer the difficulty might be removed. But the Lord had His own purpose, and He said to Paul, Speak to Me no more of this matter. My grace is sufficient. It will enable you to bear the infirmity.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 207*, 1899.—[as quoted in *Manuscript Release*,* No. 1091, par. 6; *Manuscript Releases*,* vol. 14, 57.1; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1107.5].^{††}

24. Is it possible that God might afflict us as He did Paul with some disability or “disadvantage” in order to get us to walk a closer walk with Him?
25. **Paul told us that this thorn was to prevent him from being conceited.** Do you think Paul was ever tempted to feel conceited in his days as a Pharisee? How do you suppose a problem with eyesight could keep one from becoming conceited?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: ⁷ But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, **I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan’s messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud.** ⁸Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. ⁹But his answer was: “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.” I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ’s power over me. ¹⁰I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

26. God has given us three main tasks in which He expects each Christian to be involved: (1) Bible study, (2) prayer, and (3) witnessing to others. How well are we doing at each of these essential Christian tasks? Do any of those three involve suffering?
27. Notice these words from Ellen White.

[EGW:] He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. **Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.**—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 471.1.^{††}

[EGW:] **The Lord brings His children over the same ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility fills the mind, and the character is transformed;** then they are victorious over self, and in harmony with Christ and the Spirit of heaven. The purification of God’s people cannot be accomplished without suffering.... He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. True grace is willing to be tried. If we

are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is one of peril....—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today** 92.2.†‡

28. It may seem very difficult to live a Christian life, following all of God's guidance for our lives in our troubled world today. In Romans 5:1-11, Paul talked about what God had done for him and can do for us. He concluded by writing:

Romans 5:10-11: ¹⁰We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life! ¹¹But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God's friends.—*Good News Bible*.* [Do we clearly understand how the death of Christ makes us God's friends? What is it about Christ's life that saves us?]‡

29. If God is our Father, and if He is loving, kind, gracious, and generous, then why does He need to keep bringing us back to talk about our sins and our deficiencies?

30. In this week's lesson, we talk about different types of crucibles: (1) Some come from Satan; (2) some come from our own sinfulness; and (3) some are brought on by God to help purify us and to help form our characters for His kingdom.

31. Should we be looking forward to the trials that we know are coming? Eventually, sin and evil will be completely eliminated. God must do that in order to re-create our world as it was in the days of the Garden of Eden and make it a home in which His children can dwell. So, what do we need to do to be ready for that experience? Many things!

32. It would be very helpful to be aware of the great controversy and all that it involves so we know to expect the enemy. It also means that through Bible study and prayer, we should get to know God better and better every day. And finally, it is helpful to have spiritual friends with whom to sit, to discuss topics in the Bible, and to study the Bible in depth.

33. Shouldn't these be major activities in our lives? What percentage of our time do we devote to these activities?

34. Do we take seriously the idea that Christ—by His life and His death—has answered the questions and accusations of Satan in the great controversy? Do we understand those questions and those accusations? Do we understand why His death and His resurrection have defeated the Devil? Do we know how we can join Christ's side, the victorious side?

35. In 1 Peter 5:1, Peter assured his audience that he himself had been a witness of Christ's sufferings. No one could say that Paul did not know what Christ had been through. If we believe that Christ is supposed to be our Example, should we be surprised if we are tempted and suffer? In his challenging book of 1 Peter, Peter talked about many of the aspects of suffering and how they might affect the life of a Christian.

36. But, Peter reminded us that we should not be suffering because of something wrong that we have done but rather because we have done right. And certainly, we could never claim that Jesus suffered because of something wrong that He had done! There was nothing about the life or death of Jesus, our righteous Example dying for us, that was fair or righteous or just. But, those very acts, His life and His death, are our Example and will be the Example for the entire universe for the rest of eternity. When we have the opportunity to review what happened to Jesus, especially in that final week of His life including in

Gethsemane, on Calvary, and rising from the tomb, we should never have any excuse for complaining! In fact, Peter told us:

1 Peter 3:14-17: ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are! Do not be afraid of anyone, and do not worry. ¹⁵But have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honour him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, ¹⁶but do it with gentleness and respect. Keep your conscience clear, so that when you are insulted, those who speak evil of your good conduct as followers of Christ will be ashamed of what they say. **¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if this should be God's will, than for doing evil.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

37. We know unequivocally that a time of trial and trouble is coming. In fact, if the Christian church or the Seventh-day Adventist Church members had lived more faithful lives, Jesus would have returned and taken us to heaven before now! But, surely, every faithful Christian, no matter how much he suffers or even if he should die because of his faith, will one day look up in the clouds and see Christ's coming and be glad. Notice these assurances from Peter recorded in 1 Peter 4:13-19.

1 Peter 4:13-19: ¹³Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be full of joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ's followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ¹⁵If any of you suffer, it must not be because you are a murderer or a thief or a criminal or a meddler in other people's affairs. ¹⁶However, if you suffer because you are a Christian, don't be ashamed of it, but thank God that you bear Christ's name.

¹⁷ **The time has come for judgement to begin, and God's own people are the first to be judged.** If it starts with us, how will it end with those who do not believe the Good News from God? ¹⁸As the scripture says:

"It is difficult for good people to be saved; what, then, will become of godless sinners?"

¹⁹So then, **those who suffer because it is God's will for them, should by their good actions trust themselves completely to their Creator, who always keeps his promise.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

38. We have spoken in this lesson about the Devil. His activity is described in some detail in 1 Peter 5:8-11. **But, many people in our world—even many among Christians—do not believe that there is a literal, personal Devil.**

[BSG:] The figure of the devil was real for Christians throughout history. The Protestant Reformers viewed his existence as real. **However, during and after the Enlightenment, philosophers and theologians built a worldview that rejected the existence of persons or phenomena that operated beyond the known world.** This worldview **conditioned liberal Christianity, today, to deny the existence of the devil as a real person.** Instead, this group declares that the devil is merely a mythical representation of the principle of evil. Consequently, evil is now regarded as the result of ignorance or is a product of a long, violent evolutionary

process from which the human race emerged. Thus, [they say] evil is the result of a material, genetic, and social determinism. Even if some Christians would admit the existence of the devil, they would find it difficult to believe he is indeed as wicked and powerful as depicted in the Bible.

As Bible-believing Christians, however, we regard the existence of the devil as real. For Jesus, Satan was a real being, not a symbol of some inner dark aspects of His mind (see, for instance, *Matt. 4:1–11*). Paul, too, saw the Christian as engaged in a fight that is waged against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (*Eph. 6:12, NIV*). And here, in our lesson, Peter reminds us to be on our guard against the attacks of the devil (*1 Pet. 5:8*). However, **though he is real, the Christian does not focus on the devil.** [By beholding, we become changed; we do not want to be like the Devil!] Yes, we must be aware of his existence and careful not to fall for his deceptions, but the center, the essence, and the joy of our life is Christ and His salvation.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 28.†‡§

39. Certainly, the Devil was real when he tempted Christ as recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. He was very real when he led his forces of evil to accomplish the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary.

40. Ellen White assured us that the trials we face and the struggles we go through are an essential part of the training that God has for us.

[EGW:] And the life of toil and care which was henceforth to be man’s lot was appointed in love. It was a discipline rendered needful by his sin, to place a check upon the indulgence of appetite and passion, to develop habits of self-control. It was a part of God’s great plan of man’s recovery from the ruin and degradation of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 60.1.‡

41. We are all aware that there is a lot of evil going on in our world; people are dying, people are being killed because of their beliefs. But, sometimes, we are still surprised when difficulties affect us. Should we be? Or, should we remember the words of Peter and the words of Paul and be prepared for what is coming? Is it always possible to know from where the trial or test has come?

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