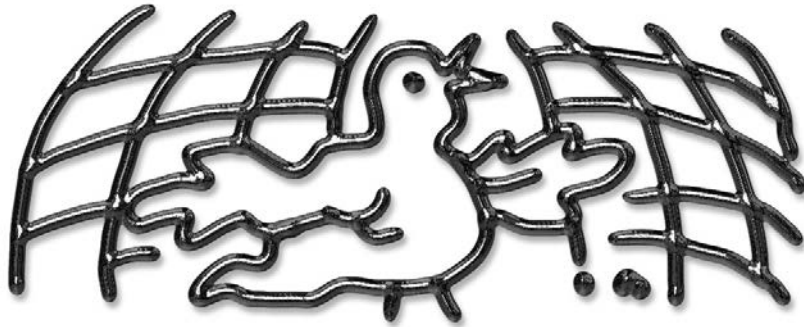


## The Birdcage



### SABBATH—JULY 9

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 14:10; Exodus 17:1; Luke 4:1, 2; 1 Peter 1:6–9; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 12:9.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “With this hope you can be happy even [no matter] if you need to have [suffer] sorrow and all kinds [different types] of tests for awhile” (1 Peter 1:6, NLV).



“The bird’s master covers the cage. Then the master puts the cage in a place where the bird will hear the one song he must sing.”

**A BIRD IN A CAGE WILL NOT LEARN TO SING** the song its master wants it to sing while the bird sits in sunlight and can hear other noises, voices, and music. Maybe the bird learns a piece of one song, a part of another song. But the bird never learns a whole song. So, the bird’s master must cover the cage. Then the master puts the cage in a place where the bird will hear the one song he must sing. In the dark, the bird tries and tries again to sing that song. That is how the bird learns to sing that song. When the bird can sing the whole song, the master puts the bird back in the light. God trains His children in the same way. God has a ‘song’ to teach us. We must learn the song during dark times of suffering. Then we can sing the song after that whenever we want.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 472, adapted.

Do you see in the paragraph we just read that the person who carries the bird into the dark is the master?

We see that Satan causes pain. That’s easy to see, right? But does God, our Master, really lead us into times of suffering? Does God really give us difficult tests that, at times, cause us to feel confused and in so much pain?

**WHEN A ROAD TO NOWHERE LEADS  
TO THE PROMISED LAND (Exodus 14:10)**

**“When Pharaoh came near, the people of Israel looked and saw the Egyptians coming after them. And they were filled with fear and cried out to the Lord” (Exodus 14:10, NLV).**

Some surprises are not very pleasant. Have you driven down a road that doesn't lead you where you want to go? Maybe mean bullies at school picked on you when you were a kid. Or a coworker tried to make you look bad at work. These experiences can be nasty surprises, right?

When the children of Israel get to the Red Sea, they get a surprise they do not expect. But they should not have been afraid. God led them from the day they left Egypt until they arrived in the Promised Land. “The LORD led the way. During the day, he used a tall cloud to lead the people. And during the night, he used a tall column [cloud] of fire to lead the way. This fire gave them light so that they could [may] also travel at night” (Exodus 13:21, ERV). God led Israel during every part of their trip. But look at where He leads them first: to a difficult place. The Red Sea is in front of them. The mountains are on the left and right. Worse, Pharaoh's army is right behind them. The Egyptians are so close that the Israelites can see them!

**Why does God lead the Israelites to a place where He knows they will be afraid? Read Exodus 14 for the answer.**

Just because God leads us does not mean that bad things won't happen in life. When God trains us to be holy, life can often be a difficult experience. God can lead us to places, people, and happenings that are hard tests. These tests show us the evil in our hearts. During these difficult times, we may wonder if we are really following God. How can we know the answer? We know that we are following God when our hearts are open to His teaching.

**What lesson do the Israelites learn from their experience at the Red Sea? Read Exodus 14:31 for the answer.**

**Why is trusting God so hard for us? Think of a difficult time that God used to teach you to trust in Him.**



**Just because God leads us  
does not mean that life  
will always be happy.**

**WATER THAT TASTES BAD (Exodus 17:1)**

**“The Israelites left the western Sinai desert. They traveled all together from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink” (Exodus 17:1, ERV).**

We may not get from God everything we want. But we can expect that God will give us everything we need, right? Not everything we “think” we need, but what God knows we really need.

One thing the Israelites needed was water. God just led the Israelites through the Red Sea. Then the Israelites followed God in the cloud through the hot desert for three days. There was no water anywhere. The Israelites started to panic. We can understand their fear. When will they get the water that they need?

So, where does God lead them? The tall cloud goes to Marah, where the people find water. The Israelites must feel so excited. But when they taste the water, they spit it out. The water tastes awful! “The people complained to Moses, saying, ‘What can we drink?’ ” (Exodus 15:24, NLV).

Then, a few days later, God gives His people another water test. This time the tall cloud stops where there is no water at all (Exodus 17:1).



The Israelites followed God in the cloud through the hot desert for three days. There was no water anywhere.

**What does God show Israel about Himself at both Marah and Rephidim? What lessons should the Israelites have learned? Read Exodus 15:22–27 and Exodus 17:1–7 for the answers.**

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**What question do the children of Israel ask while in Rephidim? Read Exodus 17:7 for the answer. Have you ever asked the same question? If yes, what happened? What lessons did you learn after God answered your question? Why do we need to stop asking this question?**

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## THE WAR BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL IN THE DESERT (Luke 4:1, 2)

“Jesus was full of [filled with] the Holy Spirit. He [Jesus] left the Jordan River, and the Spirit led him into the desert for forty days. The devil tried to make him [Jesus] do wrong. Jesus did not eat in [during] those forty days. Then he was very hungry” (Luke 4:1, 2, WE).

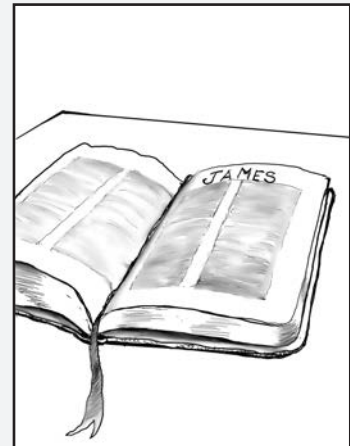
Read the story in Luke 4:1–13. What lessons can you learn from this story about how to win the war against sin?

Saying no to sin can be so hard because our evil hearts enjoy doing the wrong thing. So, that makes it easy for us to want to give in to sin. The wish to sin often fills our hearts at times when we don’t want to say no, too.

Luke 4 tells the story about how Satan tries to get Jesus to do wrong in the desert. At first, we may think that the Holy Spirit leads Jesus to sin. But the Bible shows us that God never tries to get us to sin (James 1:13). As we already saw, God does give us difficult tests. Luke 4 shows us that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing. During these times, Satan may attack us and try to get us to sin. We may not understand what is happening to us. So, we may think that we have not been following God in the correct way. But this idea is not always true.

“Sometimes God leads us into trouble and hard times. Then we often doubt if God’s Spirit has led us. But we must remember that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert. There, Satan tried to get Jesus to do what was wrong. When God brings us into hard times, He has a plan for us. This test is for our own good. Jesus did not go into the desert alone. He allowed God to lead Him. . . . Jesus also did not give up or lose hope when Satan tried to get Him to do wrong. We should do what Jesus did.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 126, 129, adapted.

Sometimes, when God gives us a hard test, we feel “burned.” We don’t feel we are made clean by the test. So, it is very comforting to know that when we fail, we can hope again. Why? Because Jesus stayed loyal to God. Jesus carried our sins for us to the cross. That is good news. He paid the penalty for our sins when we failed to say no to sin. Jesus suffered worse than we will ever suffer. God accepts us because of Jesus. There is hope, even for the worst sinner on earth (1 Timothy 1:15).



The Bible shows us that God never tries to get us to sin (James 1:13).

**THE HOPE OF NEW SKIES AND A NEW EARTH  
(1 Peter 1:6–9)**

**Read 1 Peter 1:6, 7. What does Peter say in these verses?**

Peter writes to people who suffer. Often, these people feel very alone. These suffering ones “were taken away from their homeland and are living in the countries of Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1, NLV). Today, we know this area as the country of western Turkey. A few verses later, Peter says that he knows that his readers feel sad. They have had many hard tests of faith. They had “to suffer for a little while” (1 Peter 1:6, NIV).

**Peter says that God’s people “were taken away from their homeland and were living in” other countries for many years (1 Peter 1:1, NLV). Was it easy or hard for God’s people to be away from home? Explain your answer.**



**We may suffer many painful things in life. But we must always remember the gift of everlasting life that waits for us on the new earth.**

In New Testament times, being a Christian was a new experience. There were very few Christians in those days. At best, people did not understand who Christians were. At worst, people attacked Christians and hurt them. Peter tells Christians that their experience is not strange. Yes, they may be sad for a while because of their suffering and many tests. But there is a reason for these tests (1 Peter 1:6, 7). God sends them tests to help them grow in faith.

**What hope does Peter want Christians to have while they are having troubles and tests of faith? Read 1 Peter 1:6–9 for the answer. What does this hope mean for us, too?**

Sure, we may suffer. We may have hard times in life. But everlasting life waits for us! Jesus will give us this gift when He comes back. Peter’s words to the Christians in his time are God’s words to us today. Yes, we may suffer many painful things in life. But we must always remember the gift of everlasting life that waits for us on the new earth. Then we will have a life free from pain, suffering, and death. This promise is so wonderful! Jesus’ death makes this promise possible. So, we must keep our faith when we suffer hard times. We must ask the Lord to remove from our hearts any doubt that blocks our faith.

## TESTS OF FAITH (Romans 8:28)

Alex got into trouble when he was a young man. He did drugs. He got into fights. He also spent some time in jail. But then Alex learned about God from a local church member. (The church member caught Alex stealing his stuff!) The church member was kind. He forgave Alex. Alex gave his heart to Jesus. Sure, Alex continued to have problems, both new and from the past. But now Alex was a new person in Jesus Christ. Alex loved God and wanted to show God how much he loved Him. So, Alex obeyed God's commandments (1 John 5:1, 2). Alex felt that God wanted him to serve Him fully and to preach. So, Alex decided to go to school to become a pastor.

At college, things went well for Alex, at first. Then one thing after another started to go wrong. Alex's life started to fall apart. Alex's money ran out. Then a close friend turned against Alex. The friend started to say bad things about Alex to other people. These bad things were not true, but many people believed the worst about Alex. Next, Alex kept getting sick. No doctor knew what was wrong with Alex. But soon Alex was too sick to go to class. He felt that he must drop out of school. On top of all of that, Alex started to do drugs again. Alex didn't understand why all these bad things happened. He was so sure God led him to this school. Was Alex wrong about that? If yes, was his whole experience with God a big mistake or a lie? Then Alex started to doubt the most basic Bible truth.

**What if Alex came to you during this time and asked you for advice? What advice will you give him? How can your own experiences in life help someone with Alex's problems? What Bible verses will you share? Read Proverbs 3; Jeremiah 29:13; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 12:9; and Hebrews 13:5. How can these verses be helpful to people who suffer?**

**Almost everyone who follows the Lord has suffered. During hard times, we may doubt that the Lord is leading us. We must remember to hold on to God's promises. We also must remember how God led us in the past. Then we must pray for faith and the strength to continue. The Lord won't give up on us. The question for us is: How do we keep from giving up on Him?**



Alex loved God and wanted to show God how much he loved Him.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pages 281–290; and “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pages 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; and “The Temptation,” pages 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In Bible times, the Lord led His people to Rephidim. He may choose to lead us there, too. Why? To test us. The Lord wants to see if we will obey Him and be loyal to Him. God does not always bring us to pleasant places in life. If God did, we would forget that He is our Helper. God wishes to show Himself to us. He wants to show us all the wonderful things He has made to take care of all our needs. So, God permits tests and hard times to come to us. These hard times teach us that we are helpless. During these times, we learn to turn to God for help. God can cause cool water to flow from hard, dry rock. When we see God face-to-face, we shall know how many heavy loads God carried for us. We also shall learn how many heavy loads the Lord wanted to carry for us if only we had let Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1903, adapted.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We often talk about sin as something we fight against personally. Also, are there sins we need to fight against as a family or as a church? If yes, what are these sins?
- ② In class, ask for volunteers to talk about experiences they had in life that were “not very pleasant.” What if your class members have these experiences today? Will they behave in a different way now?
- ③ We all understand the reason for the tests that God gives us. God wants to make us holy and our hearts clean. God wants to prove that we are loyal to Him. How do we explain why God gives us hard tests? Here is an example: someone is killed in a car crash. As a class, try to come up with a few possible answers for this tough question.
- ④ As a class, take time together to pray for each other. Ask God to help you to be strong to endure tests and to stay strong in faith.
- ⑤ Does your class know anyone who stopped coming to church because of a hard test? If yes, what can you do as a class to help lead this person back to Jesus?



**“These hard times teach us that we are helpless. During these times, we learn to turn to God for help.”**

### PART 3: FATHER LEAVES HIS FAMILY

**F**ather started to get mad about little things. One night, he got angry when Mother came home late from church. The next day, Mother went to the dentist's office where she worked as a secretary. She saw the office was shut down. She no longer had a job. Mother wondered how she was going to tell Father. But he wasn't home. He didn't answer his phone. Then Mother saw that his clothes were missing from the closet. That's when she knew that Father was gone. Mother didn't want to upset Junior. The boy was busy with school and his friends. So, Mother didn't tell Junior that Father was gone. Junior didn't know that Father left until three days later. At that time, Father sent Junior a WhatsApp message. Father said the Adventist religion and Candomblé, his religion, were very different. So, their family stopped living under the same roof. Mother also got a WhatsApp message from Father. He told Mother that he moved to the Candomblé temple.

"I'm never giving up my religion," Father said. "You must accept that." This news upset Mother. She decided to ask Pastor Ricardo Coelho for help. Ricardo was the pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church where she and Junior worshiped.

Mother cried as she told Pastor Ricardo that Father was a top priest in the Candomblé temple and worshiped evil spirits. Now he had left his family. Pastor Ricardo comforted Mother and gave her some advice. He opened his Bible and read some verses to Mother. One verse he shared was from Proverbs: "The wise woman makes her home what it should be, but the home of a foolish woman is destroyed by her own actions" (Proverbs 14:1, ERV). Pastor Ricardo looked at Mother and said, "Be nice to Eduardo, and pray for him."

Weeks passed. Mother had no money. She trusted the promise in Joshua 1:9, which says, "Be strong and brave . . . because the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (ERV). Grandmother learned that Mother and Junior needed more food. She told her son. Soon Father sent his family groceries. Then Grandmother told Mother that the spirits said she and Junior must go to the temple. When Mother and Junior arrived at the temple, Father was filled with a demon. The evil spirit inside Father said he was allowed to go back home. But the spirits planned to kill Father if Mother or Junior taught him about their religion or invited him to their church. Father came home that day. He had been gone for two months. Mother prayed harder for Father than she had before.

Your 13th Sabbath Offering will help build eight churches in South America. Four of these churches will be built in Brazil, where Father (Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos) and his family live.

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**When Mother and Junior arrived at the temple, Father was filled with a demon.**