

The Birdcage



SABBATH—OCTOBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 14; Exodus 15:22–27; Exodus 17:1–7; Proverbs 3; Luke 4:1–13; 1 Peter 1:6–9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Because you know this, you have great joy. You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble” (1 Peter 1:6, NIV).

“**IN THE FULL LIGHT OF DAY, THE BIRD IN A CAGE** may hear the music of other voices. But the bird will not sing the song that his master tries to teach it. The bird learns a small part of the music, but never the whole song. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song it is to sing. In the dark, the bird tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned. Then the bird breaks forth in perfect melody [song]. The bird is then brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. In the same way God deals with His children. God has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it through the shadows of suffering we can sing it ever afterward.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*, p. 472. Notice that the One who carries the bird into the darkness is God Himself.

It is easy to understand that Satan causes pain. But would God Himself actively take a part in guiding us into crucibles¹ where we experience confusion or hurt?

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: What examples can you think of in the Bible in which God Himself leads people into experiences that He knows will include suffering? What do you think were the new songs God wanted them to sing?

1. crucibles—boiling pots for purifying metals. They also represent a testing time, or time of suffering, that strengthens character, or who we are.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 14**TO THE PROMISED LAND
VIA (THROUGH) A DEAD END
(Exodus 14:10)**

Have you ever been set up? Led into a trap or to a dead end? Sometimes it can be nice, such as walking unexpectedly into a room of waiting friends who all shout “Surprise! Happy birthday!” At other times it can be quite a shock, even a very unpleasant one. It may have been bullies attacking you when you were at school. Or a fellow worker may have tried to make you look bad.

From the day the Israelites left Egypt until they reached the Promised Land, the Lord was with them. “By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud. It guided them on their way. At night he led them with a pillar of fire. It gave them light. So they could travel by day or at night” (Exodus 13:21, NIV). Every part of their journey was led by God Himself. But look at where He led them first. He led them to a place where the sea was before them. Mountains were on both sides. Pharaoh’s army was right behind!

Why did God, in Exodus 14, bring the Israelites to a place where He knew they would become afraid?

Following “the pillar” does not promise to make us happy all the time. It also can be a hard experience. This is because training in righteousness (holy living) takes us to places that



God led Israel to a place they would need to trust in Him to save them from their enemies.

hurt (Jeremiah 17:9). During these difficulties, the key is to know when we are truly following God. Just because we may not experience trials or pain does not always mean we are following God. Instead, we need to open ourselves to God’s instruction and surrender (give) our minds and hearts to His leading.

What lesson did the Israelites learn from this experience in Exodus 14:31?

Why is trusting God sometimes so hard when we know many of the wonderful promises He has for us? Recall (remember) a difficult situation caused by the Lord to teach you to “believe” in and to “fear” Him.

MONDAY—OCTOBER 15**BITTER WATERS (Exodus 17:1)**

We probably do not get from God everything we want. But should we not expect to get all that we need?

Not what we *think* we need but what we *truly* need?

There was one thing the Israelites certainly needed. That was water. God led the Israelites through the Red Sea in the cloud. Then they followed Him through the hot, waterless desert for three days. In the desert, finding water is so important. We can understand the peoples' desire for water. How would they get the water they needed?

So, where does God lead them? The pillar goes to Marah, where, at last, there is water. The people must have been excited. But when they tasted the water, they refused to drink it. This is because the water was bitter. "So the people grumbled [complained] against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (Exodus 15:24, NIV).

Then, a few days later, God leads them again. But this time the pillar stops where there is no water at all (Exodus 17:1).

What did God show to Israel about Himself at Marah and at Rephidim in Exodus 15:22–27 and Exodus 17:1–7? What lessons should the people have learned?

In Rephidim, what question do we learn of in Exodus 17:7 that the children of Israel asked? Have you ever asked the same question? If so, why? How did you feel, and what lessons did you learn after you had it answered? How many

times do we need to get it answered before we stop asking this question?



Sometimes God leads us, as He led Israel, to situations that are like bitter water. This is so we will learn to trust Him to make the experience sweet.

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 16

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY² IN THE DESERT (Luke 4:1, 2)

What lessons from the story in Luke 4:1–13 can you learn about how to overcome temptation³ and not to give up to sin?

Temptations can be so difficult because they try to get us to do things we really desire. And they always seem to come at our weakest moments.

Luke 4 is the beginning of the story about Jesus' temptation by Satan. This story brings some difficult issues

2. the great controversy—the war between Christ and Satan over good and evil.

3. temptation—something that tries to turn us away from God and tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

to our notice. At first, it seems the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus into temptation. But God never tempts us (James 1:13). God does lead us to crucibles (trials) of testing. The important point in Luke 4 is that the Holy Spirit can lead us to times of testing that expose us to Satan's fierce temptations. At such times we feel these temptations so strongly that we may misunderstand and think we have not been following God correctly. But this is not always true.

"Often God puts us in a trying situation. But we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. It was the Spirit's leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a good reason for doing so. He does this for our good. Jesus did not act upon God's promises by going into temptation without the Spirit's leading. But Jesus did not give up to depression [sadness] when temptation came upon Him. And we should not, too." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 126, 127.



God may expose us to Satan's temptations just as Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. But God never tempts us to sin.

Sometimes when in the crucible we get burned rather than made pure. So we receive comfort in knowing we may fall into temptation. But we can hope again because Jesus stood strong. The good news is that we are not forgotten or rejected by God. This is because Jesus paid the penalty (punishment) for our failure to not give in to temptation. Jesus went through a crucible worse than any of us will ever face. There is hope, even for the "chief" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

What temptations are you experiencing now? Spend some time in prayer. Ask the Lord to teach you how to use the lessons from Jesus' example in your own life. Remember, you do not have to fall into temptation, ever! Remember, too, if you do fall into temptation, that you have a Savior.

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 17

A LASTING GIFT (1 Peter 1:6, 7)

What is Peter saying in 1 Peter 1:6, 7?

Peter is writing to people who were fighting through difficulties and often felt very alone. He was writing to "God's chosen people. You are strangers in the world. You are scattered all over Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1, NIV). This is the area we know today as western Turkey. A few verses later, Peter says that he knows that they are suffering "sadness in all kinds of trouble" (verse 6, NIV).

What does Peter mean by saying the people he is writing to are “strangers” and “scattered”? How might that add to their trials (troubles)?

Being a Christian during New Testament times was a new thing. Believers were small in number. In many different places they were often misunderstood by other people. Peter encourages them by saying that their trials are not uncommon for believers (1 Peter 1:6, 7). True faith is the goal of those who persevere (never give up) through “all kinds of trials.”

What great promise in 1 Peter 1:6–9 is given to these people going through their trials? What does that hope mean for us, too?

Whatever troubles or sufferings believers have will seem nothing next to the eternity (life without end) that awaits them when Christ returns. Peter’s words to them are God’s words to us, too. Whatever trials we are facing, we must never forget the greatest goal, which is eternal (forever; without end) life in a new heaven and new earth. They are places without pain, suffering, or death. Such a promise is given to us through the death of Jesus. So it is very important for us not to lose faith. For this reason we need to ask the Lord to make us pure of everything and anything that weakens our faith.



Whatever trials we face, we must never forget the future God promises us: a new heaven and a new earth.

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 18

TRIAL BY FIRE (Romans 8:28)

There was a young man. We will call him Alex. He had come out of a very troubled youth: drugs, violence, and even some time in jail. But then, the kindness of a local church member helped Alex learn about God and give his heart to Jesus. Alex still had his problems and struggles, because his past still bothered him. But Alex was a new person in Jesus. He loved God and tried to show that love by obeying God’s commandments (1 John 5:1, 2). At one point Alex felt impressed that he should be a minister. Everything pointed to it. He was answering God’s call. There was no doubt about it.

At college things went well at first. Then one thing after another went

wrong, and Alex's life began coming apart. He ran out of money. A close friend turned against Alex. The friend made false charges against Alex that damaged (hurt) his reputation.⁴ Next, Alex began getting sick. No one knew what it was, but Alex reached the point where he thought that he might have to drop out of school completely. On top of it all, Alex was fighting fierce temptations with drugs, which were easy to get. Once, Alex even fell in that area. Alex could not understand why all this was happening. He was sure that the Lord had led him to this school to begin with. Was Alex *wrong* about that? If so, was *his whole experience* with God a *big mistake*? Even the most basic parts of his faith were coming under doubt.

Suppose that Alex came to you for advice. What would you say? What experiences have you had of your own that could help someone like him? What Bible verse would you use? How helpful might Proverbs 3; Jeremiah 29:13; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 12:9; and Hebrews 13:5 be in such a situation?

Almost all who follow the Lord have had troubles that tempted them to doubt the Lord's leading. The important thing in such situations is to (1) hold on to the promises, (2) remember God's leading in the past, and (3)

pray for faith to keep on going. The Lord will never give up on us. We are the ones who have to fight the temptation to give up on Him.

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 19

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "The Exodus," pp. 281–290; "From the Red Sea to Sinai," pp. 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*;⁵ "The Temptation," pp. 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"But the Lord did lead His people to Rephidim, and He may choose to lead us there also, to test our loyalty.⁶ The Lord does not always bring us to pleasant places. If He always did bring us to pleasant places, then we should forget that He is our Helper. The Lord desires to show Himself to us and to give us many blessings for our use. The Lord lets trial and disappointment come to us that we may understand our helplessness and learn to call upon Him for help. The Lord can cause cooling streams to flow from the firm rock. We shall never know the truth ourselves until we are with God, face to face. Then we shall see as we are seen and know as we are known. Oh, how many burdens God has accepted for us and how many burdens He would have been glad to accept if we had brought them to Him with childlike faith!"—Adapted from Ellen G. White,

4. reputation—what other people think of you.

5. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were leaders in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

6. loyalty—the act of being true or faithful to someone or something, such as family, duty, or God.

“Rephidim,” *Review and Herald*, April 7, 1903.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ We often talk of temptation as something that happens to just one person. But at the same time, are there any temptations for groups? Are there things that we as a church or a local church family might have to guard against? If so, what?

❷ Have those who are willing talk about any of the “unpleasant places” that they have experienced. Why have these places been unpleasant? If they had to visit them again today, would they understand and experience these places any differently?

❸ We all understand that God sometimes lets us be made pure by trials. But how do we understand the situation in which trials appear to have no value? (For example, someone is killed quickly in a car wreck.) As a class, try to work through possible answers.

❹ As a class, take time together to pray for one another. Pray that each member might be made stronger to go through trials and stay faithful.

❺ Does your class know of anyone who lost his or her way through trials? If so, what could you do together in a very positive way to help lead that person back to Jesus?