

## KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

*"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."*

### FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

#### Part 40

#### THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

(continued)

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, *the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days*” (Rev. 2:10).

I know a place where the sun shines everyday! Perhaps you are interested in finding it, too. It is a narrow area in the deserts of northern Chile, between the high Andes and the Pacific Ocean. Rain so seldom falls that one can truly say, “It never rains here; the sun always shines.” Morning after morning the sun rises brilliantly over the towering peaks to the east; each noon it shines brightly down from overhead; evening brings a picturesque sunset. Although storms are often seen raging high in the mountains, and heavy fog banks are observed far out over the sea, the sun continues to shine down on this favored and protected strip of land. One would imagine this area to be an earthly paradise; but it is not. Instead, it is a sterile and desolate desert! There are no streams of water, and nothing grows there.

Too often the Lord's people long for total sunshine and joy and victory in this journey into the kingdom of God. We have wished to be rid of the troubles, pressures, tribulations, and infirmities ordained for our processing. But like the sunny, infertile part of Chile, our spiritual life without the trials and testings would not be creative, productive, or transforming! We must have sunshine *and* storms for the development of wisdom, strength, and maturity!

We need the clouds, the dark days, the storms, the rain, the winds, just as much as we need the sunshine, and God who is molding our lives, making us into the image of our Lord Jesus the Christ, is the One who knows what is best for us if we would be a part of HIS PURPOSE in the earth. In this connection we hear Job saying, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath *tried me*, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Notice that Job does not say, "I know the way that **HE** takes," but rather, "He knoweth the way that **I** take."

We would like to know what God is doing! We would like to pull aside the veil and see the end from the beginning! We would like to know the way that He is taking us, but if we did, and if we could see, we would not need faith to believe and accept GOD'S WAY. So Job, in the midst of all his deep afflictions, found comfort, not in the fact that he knew the reason and the answer for all of God's dealings with him, but he took encouragement in the truth that GOD KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING! "He knoweth the way that I take," he said confidently, and then his faith leaped over every barrier, and as he looked into the distant future, he cried, "When He hath *tried — tested and proved — me*, I shall come forth as gold!" What a testimony, and truly it is ours too!

Let me share with you a favorite story of mine. It clearly illustrates the sentiment of Job when he said, "He knoweth the way that I take." The story is centered around a Chinese man. This man had everything going for him. He had all the material things he needed. He had a beloved son, and prized horse. But one day his horse broke out of

the corral and ran to the mountains. Since all his assets were tied up in this valuable horse, he lost in one brief, fleeting moment, all of his life's savings. All his neighbors, hearing that his horse was gone to the hills forever, came to offer their sympathy. They all said to him, "Your horse is gone. Oh, what bad luck." Then they cried and they tried to console and comfort him. But he said, "How do you know it's bad luck?"

Sure enough, a few days later, the horse, being well-domesticated, came back to where he could be sure there would be water and food. In the process he brought back twelve wild stallions with him. They were all quickly captured and ushered into the corral. Now when all the town heard the news, they came and they applauded and said, "Oh, thirteen horses, what good luck!" And the wise, old Chinese man said, "How do you know it's good luck?" The townspeople remembered his words the next day when his son, his *only* child, tried to break one of the wild stallions. In the process, he was thrown off, he broke his leg and was left with a limp forever. When the neighbors heard about that, they came to him again and said, "Your son, forever a cripple. What bad luck." But the wise, old man said, "How do you know that's bad luck?"

Sure enough, about a year later, a Chinese warlord came through town, conscripted every able-bodied young man, and took them off to battle. They lost the battle. In fact, every young warrior was killed. The only young man left in the village was the maimed son of the wise Chinese man, for he had never been conscripted, thanks to his limp. The moral of this story is that we do not know the way that God is taking us, or the "why" of the happenings in our lives, seemingly good or bad, but **OUR FATHER KNOWS THE WAY THAT WE TAKE AND THERE IS DIVINE PURPOSE IN ALL THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL IN OUR LIVES!**

Don't be afraid of suffering! For "I will be with you," saith the Lord. One of the amazing knowledges of God appearing in the scriptures

is, “I will be with you — through water, through fire, through everything!” The Lord told the church at Smyrna that the devil would be permitted to cast some of them “into prison” that they might be tried, and they would be afflicted “ten days.” In the spirit, prison represents a state of bondage, restriction, and limitation in which the afflicted one has lost his liberty. He is no longer in control of what is happening to him, nor is he free to decide for himself about the things that touch his life. Again and again Paul classified himself as a “prisoner of the Lord.”

The condition that builds character in the life of a son, that matures us, perfects us, and makes us strong is that God surrounds us, hedges us in, and shuts us up to His dealings and His will. We love to be free and blessed, but on the pathway to sonship we lose our freedom! God will let you run free if all you want to do is be blessed and go to heaven when you die. But like Joseph of old, if you are destined for the throne, you will be thrown into a pit and cast into prison! Perfection demands suffering, trial, testing, tribulation, and proving. Sonship requires the dealings of God by which we are conformed to the image and likeness of Christ who was, Himself, perfected through the things He suffered. Character is formed through discipline and hardship! Growth, development, and maturity in God come through the chastenings of the Father!

There have been those precious folk who have said to me, “Brother Eby, I don’t understand. Since I came into this walk of sonship things have gotten worse — all hell has broken loose!” That is just what you need — IF YOU WOULD BE A KING-PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK! Have you not known some beautiful saints to whom you naturally betake yourself in time of trial and trouble? They always seem to speak the right word, to give the wise counsel you are longing for; you do not realize, however, the cost which they had to pay ere they became so skillful in perceiving the true nature of things and giving the word of wisdom! If you were to investigate their past history, I doubt not that

you would find that they have suffered more than most. They have been caught up in the vortex of cruel crisis, they have gone through experiences in which the golden bowl of joy was dashed at their feet, and the contents spilt. They have stood by ebbing tides, and drooping gourds, and noon sunsets; but all this has been necessary to mature them in wisdom and understanding, in discernment and judgment, and fill them with mercy, compassion, and the love of God.

To every son the Father says, "I am going to limit you here, put you through pressure there, subject you to suffering, teach you obedience, hedge you in and compass you about with infirmity, break your fleshly will and subdue your carnal mind, make you humble and pure, not because you have no sonship rights, but that it will work compassion, grace, understanding, tenderness, love, faithfulness, goodness, strength — work divine nature and character in you so that out of you will flow a river of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption; and then a flow of power, enabling, and divine ability.

Oh! May God's consuming fire consume all the self-pity which may be left in some of us. Some could have made better progress, but just at the time God was perfecting them in the sonship nature they began to feel sorry for themselves. Like children in school they think they have a hard time, till they become teachers themselves and find that it is harder on the teacher. Many young people, instead of getting their school-work done, complain, and then they fail and wonder what is wrong. When God's consuming fire begins to work in us and the trials and pressures overtake us, if we then feel sorry for ourselves and drown in a pool of self-pity, we are disqualified.

Oh, my brother, my sister, how often we desire omnipotent power to change the world apart from the grace, wisdom, compassion and understanding by which the power must work! If God were to deliver us from all our troubles we would never help anybody, never understand the other fellow's dilemma; and that is why God keeps us

the way we are and plagues us and puts us under pressure, not because we are not sons, not that we will despair or faint, but that we say, “Lord, let it work in us that divine grace and longsuffering and compassion that will then flow out and minister to creation.” When the suffering is completed, the lessons learnt, and we are perfected in the nature of the Christ, then we can walk in the fullness of our inheritance and His glory shall be revealed through us to set creation free! Sonship is more than power — it is a *nature!*

There are no arm-chair kings in the kingdom of God! There are no country-club-elite sons! There are no honorary priests! There are no theoretical, self-appointed rulers on Christ’s throne! Oh, yes! The devil shall cast some of you into the prison of confinement, limitation, breaking, purging, suffering, patience, and endurance that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation “ten days.” Then the Lord says, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.” “Faithful unto death” means more than just “toughing it out” until your heart stops beating! Be thou faithful unto death — He doesn’t say be faithful *until* death, but *unto* death — unto the death of your carnal mind, unto the death of your human consciousness, unto the death of your natural reasoning, unto the death of your own will and way, unto the death of your fleshly aims, dreams, hopes, plans, and purposes, unto the death of every one of your religious traditions, activities, exercises, and entanglements — and God the almighty will then CROWN YOU WITH LIFE, even the incorruptible life of God’s glorious Christ!

## **TRIBULATION TEN DAYS**

“The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation *ten days*” (Rev. 2:10).

Those “ten days!” Let me explain to you what those ten days mean. Ten is the number in scripture that refers to *personal testing*. The number ten, the last of the scale of numbers, each of which has a mystic meaning of its own, is naturally, in the symbolism of numbers, the representative of completeness, and here, therefore, of trial and testing carried to its full extent, and lacking nothing that could make it thorough and perfect, as a test. It comes as the climax of the whole picture of the sufferings to which the typical church of Smyrna was to be exposed. It is, furthermore, a full number, denoting that which is *complete, yet of limited duration*.

Let us explore this meaning a little further. Ten is a number which is very frequently employed in scripture, and it often occurs in the book of Revelation. The antediluvian world was comprised of the lifetime of ten patriarchs. Before the heart of the Pharaoh of Egypt was inclined to let the children of Israel go to serve their God, ten plagues were sent upon the land. The whole of the law of God was summed up in ten commandments. The Lord Jesus in His parables spoke of ten virgins having ten lamps, and of servants entrusted with ten pounds whom He will place over ten cities. In the book of Revelation we read of the ten horns of the great red dragon, of the ten horns of the beast, of his ten royal diadems, and of the ten kings who shall hate the whore with whom they have committed fornication. Now if we consider all these applications of the number ten, and more besides, there can be no question of the fact that it is a round number, that whatever other number is multiplied by it, must also be a round number. As such it beautifully serves as a symbol of *completeness* and *fullness!*

When we consider the passages in which the number ten is used we find that the idea that lies at the basis of its employment seems to be that of a fullness, completion, and totality of the measure of whatever it is connected to. Ten horns are the fullness of power. Ten plagues are the fullness of judgment. Ten commandments are the fullness of divine

law. Ten virgins are the fullness of a realm of purity. Ten cities are the fullness of divine government in the kingdom of God. Ten kings are the fullness of power that smites and judges the religious harlot. And therefore, in our text it denotes the *fullness of tribulation!* It does not indicate that the time will be either long or short, but it indicates that a certain definite period is allotted to the devil to test and try and prove the called and chosen elect of God! This period is not determined by the devil, for the devil possesses no power of himself, but by the will and counsel of the Lord. The time is both limited and meted out to him by God. We see a beautiful picture of this in the life of Job!

It is the Lord saying to each of His sons, "You are not in a position to know how long your trials will last, but I know, and I can assure you that they will not last a day longer than is necessary for you. If the very hairs of your head are all numbered, and I take note of every sparrow that falls to the ground, you may rest assured that the minutest details of those trials and testings are being carefully weighed in my loving and omnipotent hands, and you will not be tempted above that you are able to bear. And even if the length of your tribulation and trouble were to cover the whole of your lifetime, that will be but ten short days in the unfolding of my magnificent plan for you in the age and the ages to come!"

Look up, dear one; no storm can last

Beyond the limits God hath set.

When its appointed work is past,

In joy thou shalt thy grief forget.

Where sorrow's plowshare hath swept through,



Thy fairest flowers of life shall spring,  
For God shall grant thee life anew,  
And all thy wastes shall laugh and sing.  
Hope thou in Him, His plan for thee  
Shall end in triumph and release.  
Fear not, for thou shalt fully see  
His afterward of peace.

“Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that *ye may be tried.*” The plot of most melodramas involves a complication in which the hero, or protagonist, is opposed by a second character, the villain, or antagonist. The antagonist is a creature of contrast, a character necessary to define the hero. Often the protagonist, or hero, goes through a reversal, a period in which he loses power to the villain, or antagonist. If the hero regains power, the story is known as a *triumph*. If the hero doesn’t regain power, the story is a *tragedy*. The Greatest Drama of the Ages is not a *tragedy*!

The protagonist and antagonist in the drama of the kingdom of God are clearly defined in the words of Jesus: “The *thief* cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: *I* am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Out of God’s own mouth proceeds the assertion, “I have created the *waster* to destroy” (Isa. 54:16). We gather from this passage the principle that teaches us that the devil is a created entity with a definite purpose. The purpose is revealed in the opening statement of the above quoted verse, “I have created the smith (the devil) that bloweth the coals in the fire,

and that *bringeth forth an instrument* for his work.” The “smith” that “bloweth upon the fire” is also the one who heats the furnace seven times hotter! “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the *fiery trial* which is to *try you*, as though some strange thing had happened unto you” (I Pet. 4:12).

Our trials and testings are associated in the scriptures with the ministry of Satan. You never thought of Satan having a *ministry*? “Then was Jesus *led up of the Spirit* into the wilderness to be *tempted (tested) of the Devil*. And when the Tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Mat. 4:1-3). “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, *Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lk. 22:31-32).

One has written, “God is constructing a temple, made of living stones, through which to manifest Himself throughout the ages to come, and Satan was created as a chisel and hammer to be used in the construction of this building. The living stones that are even now being placed in this temple have been chosen, says the Lord, in the *furnace of affliction* (Isa. 48:10). God, however, is mercy; God is love; God is compassion. He is a healer, not a destroyer. It was, nonetheless, necessary that an oven be heated in which to purify the gold — a furnace in which the wood, hay, and stubble were to be burned. But God, in His nature of love, could not perform the necessary affliction! It was for this reason that He created *an instrument* that was capable of performing this essential action in the lives of men, for in Satan God literally created *achastening rod*. If we can realize that behind the acts of Satan is the mighty hand of God working to bring forth gold from these earthen vessels, we can rejoice, as David, in our afflictions and trials and exclaim with him, ‘It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes’ (Ps. 119:7). Praise God! When we begin

to see the *good* that comes from the assaults of Satan on our lives, we are able to appreciate all the more the greatness of our God and the depth of the wisdom of His great mind. He is truly a God of might and power, and *all things* are in His hand — even this adversary whom we call Satan!” — end quote.

One of the fundamental laws of creation is that an OPPOSING FORCE is necessary for growth, and to produce strength, stamina, and endurance. Any living thing that grows up without any opposition is weak and powerless. God’s NEW CREATION MAN must be strong and powerful, and anything that desires to be strong, or anyone, must wrestle with a force that is contrary to him! Any man who wants to develop muscular power to be strong, must spend weeks and months and years in vigorous training doing strenuous exercises, lifting heavy weights, using the *opposing force* of gravity to *develop his strength*. A man who wants to be a wrestler, doesn’t just wrestle when he is in the ring. At his training center he has his wrestling partners with whom he wrestles by the hour. If he didn’t do this he would be weak and powerless in the ring! A boxer has his punching bags and sparring partners, with whom he spends hours every day.

Those *opposing forces* are indispensable to develop strength and technique. A plant that grows in a greenhouse sheltered from the winds and rains, pampered day after day, may grow large, but is inherently weak, and if suddenly exposed to the elements will wither and die. But a plant that is constantly exposed to the fierce winds and pounding rains, burning heat and chilling cold, is strong and not easily destroyed. What purpose, then, is revealed in God’s wonderful provision for us as explained by the apostle Peter: “Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary (opposing force) the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: **whom resist** (as a sparring partner) steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same *afflictions* are accomplished in your brethren” (I Pet. 5:8-9).

I heard a story the other day of a king. This king was so insecure he built a high fortress on an island, which he surrounded with a moat, filled with fierce crocodiles. He thought he was safe, but he didn't know if he could trust the strength or the loyalty of the chief of the guards. He decided to hire the most loyal, strongest, young man to be the chief of the guards. He announced that there would be a contest and all who wanted to compete could do so. They would meet on the edge of his palace. They would have to swim the moat, through the foaming crocodiles. The young man who won would be offered the position of chief of the guards, a purse filled with golden coins, as well as the hand of the king's most beautiful daughter.

The day arrived. A host of these strong young men gathered on the edge of the moat, waiting for the bugle call to announce the commencement. Hardly had the bugle call sounded when one young man plunged into the water ahead of everybody else. He managed to escape the crocodiles and reached the other side in record time. The king came and said, "You were wonderful! Do you have anything you wish to say to the people?" The young warrior said, "Yes! I want to know who pushed me!"

This is a humorous little story, but it illustrates the wonderful truth that *sometimes God pushes us!* I really believe that the testings of God's sons come in that manner. It takes guts to leave the lowlands of Adamic life and the ruts of man-made religion and scale the dizzy heights of God and search His awesome depths. Sometimes we all need a divine shove!

Things don't just happen to the children of God,

They're part of a wonderful plan;

The troubles, reverses, the sorrows, the rod,  
Are strokes of the Great Sculptor's hand.

When some dread accident strikes you a blow,  
And you worry and fret and demand;  
Why try so hard the mystery to know?  
It's not just an accident; it's planned!

Have you been dropped from a place of power?  
Do you wonder and reprimand?  
Don't rebel, look to Him in that hour;  
This didn't just happen; it's planned!

Persecution, tribulation come down like a storm;  
Friends disappoint and withstand;  
At last, all *alone*, bewildered, forlorn,  
You look, and He smiles: "This is planned."

Do you wonder why God to affliction should call,

And why you must suffer and moan?

“No man should be moved by affliction” says Paul,

“For you know it is part of the plan.”

Things don't just happen to children of God,

The blue-print was made by His hand;

He designed all details to conform to His Son,

So all things that happen are planned.

No matter what happens to those called “His own”,

Events that are awful or grand;

Every trial of your life He sends from His Throne;

Things don't just happen; they're planned!

— Chuck Tober

This corresponds with what we know about all of life. Testing is a necessity of living! We test wood, steel, and stone in order to find out what they are capable of supporting. We test our ability to read, to run, and to think, but no one therefore calls them evil. We find out something about ourselves, even if that something is not always complimentary. Everything in life is tested in some manner! In this way

“temptation” has a good sense as well as a bad; for example, God is said to have tempted, that is, proved Abraham in the matter of offering up Isaac. So Jesus is said to have tempted, that is, proved Philip in the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. “Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto Him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat? And He said this to tempt (*prove*) Philip, for He Himself knew what He would do.” To *prove* Philip, to test him, see what he would answer and what was in his mind — but the word is *tempt!*

Every parent understands that the very worst thing that could happen to any child would be to escape all the pain of discipline, all the irksomeness of education, all the difficulty of work and experience, and be allowed in all things to please himself without any restraint. Such treatment would infallibly produce an ignorant, selfish, rebellious, irresponsible and wicked son or daughter. Just as feeding a child on cakes and sweets alone would ensure the ruin of its health. Now and again some father who has himself known hard sledding decides to make easy for his children the way of life. “I don’t want them to suffer the way I had to suffer,” he says. So they are not required, as he was, to get up early in the morning. They are not made, as he was, to get a job and earn their way at an early age. They are not deprived, as he was, of all the things young people want. They are placed in conditions that are wholly favorable and that make no difficult demands.

And now and then some human father who has made easy for his children the way of life finds himself wondering why they have made so little of themselves! He has given them every opportunity, and it fails him to understand why they are lacking in most of the qualities of ambition, discipline, dependability, thriftiness, and vision he had hoped to find in them. But has he given them every possible opportunity? Not at all! He has denied them the supreme opportunity that a rough road affords for the development of strength and character! And this is what

happens spiritually in the lives of all those starry-eyed *faith* and *positive thinking* people who want only blessings and instant deliverance out of all their troubles!

There are no evils lurking in the carnal mind and fleshly nature of us all for which there is no deliverance except through the crucible of suffering and pain and discipline; even as the dross found mixed with pure gold in the ore can only be separated and eradicated through the fiery furnace. The more we are exposed to *adverse* circumstances, the more we have to *wrestle* with our environment, the more we are *challenged* by the world around us, the stronger we become! Saints, IF WE WOULD BE SONS OF THE MOST HIGH, WE MUST BE **STRONG** IN THE LORD AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT!

Our Father wants us to be strong! The Father of spirits did not look forward to a distant day, at the time of His begetting, expecting that a multitude of babies in diapers or grown up ninnies and dummies would stand before Him. Oh, no! How many of those who read these lines want their children to grow up one hundred percent *innocent, ignorant, and privileged*, never having experienced the slightest temptation, struggle, or adversity in any form? This is precisely why God placed the **serpent** in Eden with the tree of the **knowledge of good and evil** — that man through the experience of the *opposites* might in the experience be led to OVERCOME all things and to stand before the Son of man in the strength of character, perception of mind, and quality of life of God Himself. It is all part of our Father's wise and magnificent plan!

As someone has written, "Man shrinks from tests for they call for the best that is within one. A school teacher does not give her pupils a test so that she may have the satisfaction of failing them, but rather that she may be delighted by their display of knowledge. Automobile manufacturers do not put test cars through rugged workouts to wreck them, but rather to improve their product and find how to strengthen



their points of weakness. Even so it is when the Lord sends temptation into our spiritual lives. It is not intended to wreck us, though at times that may *appear* to be the result, but it is intended for our good! They are to make us strong! They are to do for us what the sculptor does for the rude block of marble. They are to do for us what the lathe does for the rough and coarse cylinder of steel. Thus it was that Job said, ‘When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold!’”

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (I Pet. 4:12-13).

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation (testing): for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

“When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don’t resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith, and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots” (James 1:2-4, Phillips).

When the Father through His matchless grace reveals to the child of God that it is His Master Plan for the ages to come to effect a universal reconciliation, restitution, and restoration through the agency of a royal race of kings and priests who through trial, suffering, and fierce tribulation have come to the image of Jesus Christ, to reign and work with Him in the plenitude of His wisdom, the fullness of His understanding, the perfection of His holiness, the infiniteness of His love, the beauty of His justice, and the omnipotence of His power, every son having the mind of God, discerning all things, knowing all things and

having the perfect nature, character, and ability to carry out the intricate and infinite will of God — then all our tribulation is freighted with vital significance!

Among that perfect, omnipotent order of kings and priests there will be no carnal minds, no fleshly actions, no selfish desires, no self-serving, no weakness, no limitation, no character flaws, no mistakes, no dissensions, no disobedience; but with justice and wisdom and righteousness and compassion and love and power shall they rule the nations, and ultimately the vastnesses of the unbounded heavens until all things everywhere are subdued unto Christ, and Christ shall present a perfect kingdom to the Father. Aren't you glad!

Now since such glories are in store for the sons of God, can any man longer question why our all-wise heavenly Father should take such pains to bring His sons to perfection? None knows better than He exactly what is needed to transform His sons from corrupt and carnal creatures of the dust to beings of divine understanding and heavenly glory. I have often said that I have strong confidence in the ability of my heavenly Father to bring me to perfection and maturity as a son of God. My Father is a great son-raiser! What a colossal success He was with His firstborn! Anyone who can raise a son like Jesus knows exactly what He is doing and can surely handle you and me, my precious brother and sister.

“We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in *bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect THROUGH SUFFERINGS*...wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Heb. 2:9-10; Phil. 2:9-10).

Beholding the glory of Jesus Christ we can understand why the Father takes such infinite care to bring all His sons to perfection! Would you dare to imagine that any of the presidents, prime ministers, kings, or dictators of this present world system would be found fit candidates to straighten out the mess this world is in? Do you think for one moment that any of the world's past or present rulers possess either the wisdom or ability to bring an end to war, terrorism, strife, bigotry, crime, poverty, ignorance, fear, deceit, greed, broken homes and hearts, sickness, pain, sorrow, and death, restoring all into perfection again? Ah — apart from *many sons brought to glory* there is no hope for mankind! The ages to come will be given into the hands of God's choicest sons — saints fully developed, perfected through suffering, matured through trial, proven through testing, far beyond the reach of corruption and decay, far above the realm of greed, selfishness, deception, or any such thing. Isn't it wonderful!

I am reminded of the boy who wanted to help the butterfly out of its pupa. He saw that it struggled hard to get loose. Only a few strands held it back. So the boy clipped these off. The butterfly was free! And the boy was very happy, both about the butterfly and about the little operation he had performed. But so much greater did his sorrow become when he discovered what a well-intended but destructive labor of love he had performed. The butterfly could not fly and could not learn to fly. The exertions by which it was to have worked itself out of the pupa were what would have strengthened it and enabled it to fly!

I mentioned earlier the words of David wherein he said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). You may wonder as I have — what kind of theology is this? How could my present distresses work in me the qualifications necessary to be a king-priest! The Hebrew word for *affliction* here means, "browbeaten, troubled, abased, chastened, defiled, hurt, humbled, weakened, depressed." When you put this meaning into the

verse, suddenly it reads, “It is good for me to have been browbeaten, troubled, abased, chastened, defiled, hurt, humbled, weakened, and depressed. And it all has been for one purpose — so that I could learn the Lord’s statutes!” The word *statutes* in this verse means “engraved law.” The Psalmist is saying, “It’s good that I went through all these troubles — because in the process God was *engraving His laws, ways, and nature in my heart!*”

We’ve prayed to reign with Jesus  
But we’ve not known what we asked.  
Our eyes have been unenlightened  
As disciples in the past  
Who came with this same prayer  
(Although phrased a different way)  
“Lord, let us sit beside you  
In the coming kingdom Day.  
One upon the left, dear Lord,  
And one upon the right.”  
And then He said to them, as us,  
“Can you endure the night?  
Can you endure the anguish  
Of a death upon the cross?”

And are you able," asks the Lord,

    "To suffer that great loss

    Of a horror of such darkness

That God's face is hid from view?

    And can you bear exposure

    Before men and angels, too?

    The cup I drink is better;

    Its wine is mixed with gall.

The crown I wear is made of thorns;

    My royal robe's a pall.

The throne you ask to share with me

    Is raised 'twixt earth and sky

And the glory of the reign from there

    Is hid from human eye.

    Are you able now to drink

    The cup my Father gives,

And can you see that he who dies

    Is one who truly lives?

That he who rules is he who stoops

To wash another's feet;  
And that the cross is God's own throne  
Where He and sinners meet?"  
These are the questions put to me  
As I bowed down in prayer;  
And still the questions that He asks  
Of all those who would share  
The glory of His kingdom,  
The greatness of His power,  
The resurrection life He brings  
In this world's final hour.  
For there's no life until there's death,  
No glory without shame,  
And we must truly learn to die  
If we would wear the name  
That's given those who overcome  
And share His glorious throne  
When Christ descends and brings reward  
To those He calls His own!

— Author  
unknown

When the hour arrives for God to move us toward overcoming, spiritual maturity, perfection, and sonship He brings undeserved trials into our life. When these experiences arrive, we don't like them at all! Our first thought is disbelief; our first inclination is to ask what we have done to deserve this! Then we question God's goodness, faithfulness, and sovereignty. If I am a son of God, why does God allow this to happen? But each crisis is actually a precisely orchestrated opportunity to bring about our spiritual perfection! The afflictions of life are God's ingenious instrument to crucify our carnal mind, and mature our spirit.

Elwin Roach expressed it this way: "Very often people's problems come when they find themselves in hardships of refinement. Straightway they reject it! They ask, 'Why would God let me go through something so terrible when He could prevent it?' The answer is simple — He is not '*letting*' you go through it — He is '*making*' you go through it! He is driving you through it as surely as an unbroken horse is driven into a corral and broken by its owner. If the horse learns obedience, forsaking its own will, it can then be used throughout the man's kingdom. If not, it will be sold for dog food and soap. If your will is not broken during this time, and you insist on maintaining your *self-expression*, I doubt that you will wind up as dog food and soap; but you will be of little value in the kingdom of God. Think about it!"

It is the elect of the Lord who have been specifically selected by the Father to partake of the sufferings of Christ through the trials and tribulations which He brings into our lives. It was the plan and purpose of God that each son of God should be tested and tried to prepare us for the glory of His kingdom we are destined to receive. Don't think that you have to suffer *great things* like martyrdom or twenty years in a rat-

infested prison in order for God to accomplish His work. Oh, no! There is a vast variety of events in our everyday lives uniquely designed to test every area the Lord would put His hand on. Each of us has had a unique set of tests and trials to go through to build the character of Christ in our life. Your trials have not been harder than mine, just different. We are distinct members of the Christ body, and the Lord's processings for each one varies according to His purpose in us and the place we shall fill.

Though we shall all ultimately be joined in union with Christ as one complete corporate man, each of us will be a unique expression of the fullness of Himself, in a way that only we can express Him. The Lord has a sovereign purpose to fulfill in each of our tests and trials, and He watches over it. To know that the Father has a sovereign purpose in all that we experience and endure may not make the trials any easier to go through. But it gives us understanding, purpose, and hope of the glory that shall be revealed in us when it is finished.

God does not lead all His chosen in the same path or deal with them in the same way. He is not pouring every son into the same mold. He does not want assembly-line believers. He is not making Fords, He is transforming people! And so the experience will be different for each one. Not even two fingerprints are alike. God made us that way, for we are different. We are all human, but each of us is a unique expression of that humanity. All of us physically are from that first man, Adam; yet none of us is alike. It is amazing what God can do with two ears, two eyes, one nose, and one mouth. He sure comes up with some funny designs! If you don't believe it, look around you. All are human, but no two are alike. One is a plumber, another a race-car driver, another a teacher. One is tall, another short, with every shade between black and white, fat and thin, beautiful and ugly, and no two in any category look alike! How different! And yet — how alike! God makes everyone different. Do not expect Him to deal with you as He dealt with someone else, even though you both be sons. He is



conforming all His elect to the image and likeness of Christ, but every member of the Christ body is a unique expression of His nature and glory!

The Scripture states that Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be *tested* by the devil.” It is abundantly evident, since Christ is the Pattern Son, the firstborn among many brethren, that all who follow Him unto sonship shall also be led of the Spirit into their own wilderness experience to be tested by the devil. Sonship is not a doctrine to be received with the assumption that because we believe it and embrace its truths, we are therefore qualified to be the manifest sons of God. Not at all! The process by which we must all *qualify* for sonship has already been demonstrated in the life of Jesus. As He was LED OF THE SPIRIT into the wilderness to be tested by the devil, even so must we also be LED OF THE SPIRIT into our own personal wilderness, to be tested by the devil. Not every child of God is tested in this way! Is that not why the church in Smyrna was told, “Behold the devil shall cast *some of you* into prison, that ye may be tried.” SOME of you! *Not* ALL of you! Not all will be overcomers! Others are content to live in lesser realms. They will not be chastised as sons! Unless we are tried and proven in the wilderness, we have no claim to sonship. The Holy Spirit is most explicit in this regard, for we read, “But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:8). We should therefore welcome the tests that come our way, for the Father is testing and proving us to determine the qualities of His life within us. We should submit to these tests and allow the Lord to work His righteousness within us. Then we shall be released from those tests and trials and will be declared righteous.

The apostle Peter tells us that we should not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing had happened unto us (I Pet. 4:12-13). The fiery trial itself is difficult enough to endure, but when there is added to the suffering an

uncertainty as to why it is necessary, or what the cause might be, then it becomes more difficult to bear. This frequently is the case with the people of God; when visited by afflictions of one sort or another they wonder *why* this is happening to them! It is this that Peter is explaining to us! “Think it not strange,” he says, “as though some strange thing happened unto you.”

The King James translation does not give us the full depth of thought expressed by Peter. Basically, the Greek word here translated “strange” is one that suggests the relationship between a host and a guest; that is, those who are not members of the same family. What does it mean to be a host? A host or hostess *entertains* those who come to the home, makes them feel comfortable, and ministers to their every need and want. So what Peter is saying is, when this fiery trial comes to your door and knocks, then you are to be a host to that trial. Bring it in and entertain it! Do not act as though it were a stranger that has come whom you would like to get rid of if you could. This is, indeed, a strange word to the natural man! But that is really what Peter is saying. “Be a host to this trial, bring it in and let it have its full work in you.” It is a similar word used by Paul in his reference to the experience of Abraham when visited by three angels. Paul wrote, “Be not forgetful to entertain *strangers*; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:1).

Confirming this viewpoint of our trials is the Greek word used in this passage, and translated “happened,” in the expression, “as though some strange thing happened unto you.” Its literal meaning is “to walk together.” The thought is that when trials visit us, and even walk together with us, we are not to think of them as strangers, or aliens, but to accept such experiences as though they were our friends, or even members of our family! Peter explains that the reason we should not think of our trials as being strange, or alien to us, is that in experiencing them we are *partakers of Christ’s sufferings*, or, as the Greek text

indicates, we are “partners” in Christ’s sufferings. HE **WAS PERFECTED THROUGH THE THINGS HE SUFFERED!** In other words, in our trials we are sharing the common experience of all whom our heavenly Father has called to sonship to share in the glory and power of His kingdom!

Since trials and testings are so closely related to our hope of glory, we should not consider them as strange, but should welcome them into our lives just as we would welcome a beloved member of our family, get acquainted with them, and learn well the lessons which they alone are able to teach us. Just think of the blessing Abraham derived from being host to the three strangers who visited him! Instead of resenting the fact that they had called, he treated them as members of his family, and became involved thereby in the salvation of Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Most Christians today do not particularly care for this sort of scripture. That is the proof that they are not the called out elect of the Lord! Most feel that when they have believed in the Lord, and have obeyed the Lord, they should be BLESSED! They should not suffer. They should have the very best of everything, financial, material, and physical blessings galore. Can you envision Paul in the Philippian jail expressing those sentiments? Can you hear him in any way questioning his confinement because He was a man of faith and power and had preached the gospel and obeyed the Lord? Is it possible to hear Paul complain about his suffering because he had such great power with God and had done the will of God? He was not in jail because of any evil He had done! He knew the ways of God, and he gladly shared in the sufferings of Christ that he, too, might be perfected! James, too, understood this great principle when he said, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (testings); knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2-3).

I think that in the midst of all this, if God is to be glorified, it depends on how we respond to our testings and trials. We should recall that the same sun that melts butter also bakes bricks. The sun is the same; the substances are different and in the same type of affliction some people are made better and some people are made bitter. It depends upon our faith and our calling! And that is how you can distinguish a son of God! Sons know that there is *divine purpose* in all their afflictions and tribulations, and as they truly overcome in them they are made *better!* Those who are made *bitter* by the trials are bastards, and not sons. Every member of God's called out elect is made better! You will know the elect of the Lord by the intensity of their Christ-like sufferings, and their joy and confidence in them, not by vague, empty-sounding and high-sounding religious claims they may make.