

# CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

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## Chapter Sixty-One

The opening ceremonies at the Olympic Stadium were absolutely spectacular. Günter Zahn, a West German athlete, lit the Olympic torch. There were multiplied thousands in attendance. It was thrilling beyond Andy's wildest expectations. He sat with Janys and Dan. Both Andy and Janys were on their best behaviour under Dan's watchful eye.

One hundred and twenty-one nations had produced 7,134 athletes to compete in 195 events over the next two weeks. This Olympics was the largest ever, setting records in all categories. Twenty-two-year-old Mark Spitz of the United States did similarly. He competed in seven swimming events, won gold in every one, *and* set a new world record all seven times! Get him saved, Andy remembered thinking as the Olympics unfolded, and you'd have the Ultimate Witness for Christ, including biblical symbol-laden perfection of the number seven. That he might become a "Jew for Jesus" seemed too much to hope for. It was. They would have to settle for Neal Steinhauer.

Sunday morning was the first distribution of the booklets. G. E. had planned for all to do so in front of the main entrance to the Olympic Park.

The weather was beautiful, a fresh breeze was invigorating, and all were evidently pumped. Except Andy.

He dutifully began distributing the booklets. His mind churned as he did. He imagined himself recipient of one, casually leafing through it, becoming suddenly aware of the religious agenda. He could barely look people in the eye. What if someone really wanted to talk with him? What would he say?

The hours dragged by. No one asked any questions. He handed out hundreds. He got through the day, his mind leaden.

They arrived home in time for clean-up before supper.

There was a pleasant path from *Maranatha* leading down to a stream that Andy had walked during his earlier visit. He and Janys followed that after supper. Andy had told Janys he wanted to talk to her about hell. A little taken aback, she was nonetheless game. He dutifully refrained from holding her hand.

The evening was still full of light and warmth, but Andy hardly took note, so intent was he on the issue before him. After summarizing his recent ruminations, he finally stopped and turned to face her. "As I see it, Janys, if the doctrine of final damnation is ultimately brought on by God, then the final reality of God is not, as the Bible says, *love*, but *hate*, is it not?"

Janys took a moment to ponder this.

"I mean," Andy went on, "Christians have done horrible things to others through the ages. Isn't it just a short step from believing God intends hell for the infidel to believing Christians can give anyone '(temporal) hell' they deem deserving? Isn't that what the church has done or willed for two thousand years?"

Janys still didn't say anything.

Andy took a breath. "I borrowed a concordance from the church library and looked up all New Testament references to hell. Unless I missed something, and I don't believe I did, only once, in Revelation twenty

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twenty, is there a clear reference to hell as a place of intentional torment. But that is all highly symbolic language, and besides, no humans are so tormented according to that passage.

“Further, if God really does torment, as is claimed, for ever, then God must be the one to sustain lives for ever for such torture. Otherwise it would be impossible for anyone to live through it. So God must somehow keep them alive to continue punishing them. And forever, Janys! Just imagine the worst electric shock torture, only you never die, never lose consciousness, just keep on getting zapped, screaming in abject pain. For ever and ever Amen!”

“Maybe it doesn’t mean eternal conscious *physical* punishment, Andy.”

Andy thought for a moment. “But pain is still pain, whether emotional or physical. I know that too well—so do you! And in that case, shouldn’t such emotional pain be designed to lead to remorse and repentance? If so, how could it be eternal? Or do we believe in a God who, despite our repentance, still punishes us on and on?”

Janys held up her hand. “What about that story of King Saul’s disobedience? Weren’t he and his whole future bloodline punished for just one act of disobedience? He lost the kingship and begged Samuel and God to forgive him. But God refused.”

“In that story,” Andy said, “didn’t God also order Saul to wipe out every man, woman, child, infant, and every other living thing? And then destroy everything else? Today we’d call that ‘genocide’ and ‘scorched earth.’

“One of my dad’s most quoted Scriptures is from there, First Samuel fifteen, verse twenty-two: ‘Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.’ As I used to say to Dad, after my sister first pointed this out, what Saul failed to obey was doing to people what Hitler did against the Jews, Stalin to fellow Russians, Mao against loyalist Chinese, and the absolute violation of every human and property right we hold dear today. The more I think about it, the more I realized how it blatantly, fully, abjectly contradicts Jesus’ command to ‘Love your enemies.’

“In that story, you may also recall that King Agag is brought back alive, and Samuel, speaking for God, bawls out Saul for that, too. Then Samuel turns to Agag, who says surely the time for killing is past, but Samuel says something like, ‘Just as you have made many mothers in Israel weep, so today I shall make your mother weep.’ Then Samuel hacks King Agag into little pieces—before the Lord, according to the text—which means with God’s full approval. Did you ever see that TV clip of a Viet Cong being summarily executed, gun held to his head one minute, next minute blood spurting out, lifeless body dropped to the ground? That’s God-fearing Samuel—only worse in that Samuel had no quick trigger to pull. He probably had to hack away for some time to get the job done. Imagine the gore! And God looked on and smiled?

“The whole story is really about God seeking revenge on the Amalekites for waylaying the Israelite ancestors centuries before. What a way to picture God, nursing a hateful grudge toward the Amalekites for hundreds of years until he finally gets one of His servants to slaughter them all!

“When I challenged Dad on this, all he would ever say back was, ‘God’s ways are not our ways.’ But can God arbitrarily make black white and not cause the whole concept of morality simply to implode inwards?”

He paused to allow Janys to respond, but she remained silent.

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“So can God really conquer all evil, finally, when hell, *which is ultimate evil* by definition, exists? And why? Why would God sustain a tortured person’s existence for ever and ever? Just to bring Him pleasure, He who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (so it says in Ezekiel) and who does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone (that’s Lamentations) who is ‘love’ according to First John? Isn’t such a notion precisely the kind one can well imagine a Hitler or a Mussolini wanting, *or a totally sick psycho?* But God—who ‘loves us and has a wonderful plan for our life’—and afterlife, unless we don’t buy in, then it’s torture BIG TIME for ever and ever? Isn’t hell, in the end, in the way we have traditionally believed it, *sheer gratuitous evil of the most abominable kind?*”

Andy waited. Still no answer. They started to walk again, both silent for several minutes.

“Then why do evangelism?” Janys asked, finally.

Andy thought about it for a moment. “My uncle used to say that you could come alongside any child at camp and get them to pray the sinner’s prayer, especially when hell was mentioned. He really disagreed with the scare tactics of some of the preachers, especially when directed toward children. He called it ‘spiritual child abuse.’

“If God is so scary that He banishes us to hell for not believing, then it’s just as well not to introduce people to that kind of ‘god’ anyway, in my opinion. I feel sick about all this, Janys, and I don’t know where to turn. I have felt God all my life. I’ve always accepted the idea of hell, even raised it in various discussions. But lately I just don’t know.”

Andy stopped again. “The thing that really bugs me is, how come no one else seems bothered by this? How come everyone just accepts this thing and asks no questions? I don’t get it. Does no one else *think* about these things? What Evangelical can I ask about this without getting into trouble?”

They started walking again. “I guess the bottom line is, I know God as one who loves me. If heaven is there for me because of that love, then I can’t fit hell in as ‘the other side’ of that love. Whatever hell or punishment is, it has to be part of God’s love or God is the ultimate schizophrenic Tyrant, and I want no part of His ‘love’ anyway. For, in that case, God’s heaven is hell, since hell finally contradicts, swallows up, heaven. If God wills hell as some kind of ultimate punishment, then that’s who God is in the end: a hateful being that I want nothing to do with. Trust in such a “god”? Not in a million eternities!

“So where does that leave me tomorrow when I hand out this booklet to dozens, likely hundreds again, of people, Janys? What do I do?”

They stopped on a bridge that passed over the stream and stared down at the water.

“Sometimes I think you think too much, Andy! If Evangelicals mainly don’t *think* but *feel*, just want to *feel* good about God and themselves, and their *thinkers* just think enough to make the *feelers feel* good about not thinking, about their selfish little self-righteous lives, like an inoculation, you *think* way too much!

“I look back over all the discussions we have had, and I could get a headache just thinking about all that thinking you’ve done. I do a lot of thinking, and I know you find me an intelligent person, but I just am not always *thinking* like you are. Sometimes it’s good to just take a deep breath and smell the roses.”

This was not quite the response Andy was looking for, but he digested it all the same.

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“I guess I’ve accepted the teaching about hell I was raised with, because that’s just the way things are: punishments and rewards are with us in every aspect of life. So why not after death, too? Why can’t God be God and we just accept what the Bible teaches? Isn’t that what you always say?”

Andy pondered this for a time. “Janys,” he began, “what would be one time of total contentment for you in your life? Think about that. I’m guessing one such is beyond memory, when you were a newborn child totally surrounded by your mother’s warmth, love, and nurture. Think about the image of a newborn baby, Janys, of a mother’s total care of and love for her. Then imagine God in that role. That fits what we know and say about God. Remember, Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem to himself like a mother hen gathers her chicks. Remember all those biblical images of God nurturing His people like a mother?”

“Then switch your imagination to a torture room in Central America, where that same little baby, now grown to mature adult, is stretched out on a cold mattress, is viciously raped and undergoes routine indignities beyond imagination. She cries out for the release of death, but that does not come. And the pain and torture are endless.

“Now, can you honestly imagine the same mother in both roles, arranging for and superintending the second reality, no matter what the rationalization? Yet that is precisely what teaching you and I have been led to believe, that the same “god” who created us out of an enormous free act of love—who loved us so desperately that He gave ‘His only begotten Son’ to birth us a second time—somehow just as determinedly plans the most malicious eternal outcome imaginable if we do not *believe* in Him. In that case, Jesus dies *above all to save us from God!* That’s crazy! It boggles my mind, Janys that this has been taught for two thousand years! If this is the only way we can think about God according to the Bible, I’m checking out. It is sick beyond all human imagining! But the reason I say this now, Janys, *is precisely because I read my Bible!*

“Meanwhile, I have to hand out an evangelistic tract, as do you, about God’s love for us that forewarns, at the same time, that any who reject Christ’s offer *werden Schmerzen, Kummer und Pein erleiden in der ewigen Dunkelheit der Hölle*. That’s what it says, Janys, in just about those exact words. That if we reject Christ we will experience everything that woman tortured in Central America experienced *in the eternal darkness of Hell*. And Dr. Harlow’s book says the same thing: that if we reject Christ we will experience *Furcht, Trauer und Zorn*. Fear, sadness, and wrath, Janys. He quotes several passages from Matthew to prove it. That’s what we’re saying God is planning for each person who rejects Him! Do you really believe that? I don’t. I can’t. I won’t!

Janys had no answer, certainly nothing remotely satisfactory for Andy. Andy knew she knew that. They both felt trapped by the awareness.

Andy walked over to a nearby bench and sat down. Janys followed. The stream gurgled beside them. Birds sang. Butterflies fluttered through the trees. It was “Edenic,” Andy thought. Suddenly, Andy snapped to the realization that he was all alone in glorious nature with the most remarkable woman he had ever met. Yes, he had finally admitted that on this trip. He felt the fool for having taken nearly a year to acknowledge it and was suddenly overwhelmed that she was actually attracted to *him*.

“Andy, you make my head spin sometimes with what you say,” Janys responded. She smiled. “I like your *lips* better than your *quips*, I guess.”

Andy looked at her. There had been some vague talk of covenant in distant memory, existentially displaced by such immediately accessible presence. He did not know whose lips moved forwards first, but he did

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know sudden exquisite delight. Whatever hell might be, in that moment Andy was experiencing its polar opposite.

They pulled apart tenderly, self-conscious that others could be walking the path. They stood to continue the loop. Neither said anything about their covenant, but neither did they hold hands.

“Andy,” Janys said softly, “I’ve never met a guy like you. You think hard; you’re honest, gutsy, tender, and respectful. Okay, you have an ego. But so do we all. And your thinking at times really does scare me. Not because it’s off the wall, but because it makes so much biblical and common sense!”

“I don’t like your questions about hell, because I have no answers, and they are so biblically rational. It bothers me that you would be thinking this way when we’ve already had enough problems getting started on our evangelism. What a time to be having second thoughts about our core mission!”

“On the other hand, these questions arise from your personal faith journey, which I think is full of integrity. If you’re thinking these thoughts, surely others are, too. How could you suppress them and remain honest about the very faith you claim to be ‘the Truth’?”

“Andy, why not do a session on the issue with all of us here? I know it would upset some, but still, wouldn’t it be just posing honest questions, which G. E. has always taught us never to shrink from? And isn’t that Francis Schaeffer’s trademark, ‘honest answers to honest questions’?”

“Besides, there are several leaders here who have attended Bible School and have sat under Christian teaching for years. They must have thought through this issue and come up with satisfying answers. Why not arrange something?”

Why not indeed? Andy thought.

They had almost done an entire loop, back to where their walk had begun.

“Janys, you know what scares me even more than all this stuff about hell and evangelism? That I have missed something for almost an entire year... That the most exquisite gem I have ever seen in my whole life should have glittered under my nose, and I did not even notice. I feel I owe you an apology. Then again, maybe it was just as well when we ended up sleeping together early on. Can you imagine the challenge of that stormy night now—Cathars notwithstanding?”

Janys said nothing, though a ghost of a smile played across her lips. Luscious lips, Andy thought.

“So my many years of blindness about violence, hell and what else? It’s scary. There *must* be lots more to which I’ve also been blind. Maybe life consists in ‘catching sight’ just off the corner of our vision of what’s *really* going on all the time. Like seeing those elusive Irish leprechauns or fairies who seem to dematerialize just as we glance their way. Enter faith, right. Or Jesus’ ‘eyes to see, ears to hear.’”

“An art, not a science,” Janys said quietly as they entered the dining hall for supper. She added quietly, “Andy, you do not owe me an apology. You have no idea...”

He looked down. Her eyes were glistening. He knew that sentence was not going to be completed. Neither did it need to be.