



WHY?

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Photo by C. Young

A look at six characters in the Bible who asked the question “Why?” and God’s response to those individuals who asked this question. Written by C. Young

Why?

Many times we have heard that we should not ask “Why?”. We should just trust God because He knows what is best for us. But does God really mind if we ask “Why”? What does the Bible say?

This short book takes a look at six characters in the Bible who asked “Why?”. The first one considered is Job. Job suffered much sorrow, pain, and rejection. He wondered why he had been born and why he could not die. David endured great hardship when his own son turned against him and tried to take over his kingdom. He wondered why he had lost the love of his own son and the love of the people of his kingdom. Elijah was fearful as he fled from the wrath of Jezebel. He had won a great victory for the Lord at Mount Carmel, and he thought that the people of Israel had turned back to the Lord. But then he had to flee for his life. He wondered why he was all alone in his stand for God. The pressures on Elijah became so heavy that he gave up. He wanted to die, and God raised up a man named Elisha to take his place. Another character in the Bible who questioned “Why?” was Jeremiah. Though Jeremiah served God faithfully, he suffered rejection from his people. He was also put into prison and, at one time, even thrown into the dungeon. He believed that God had brought him down into darkness and that God had turned his hand against him. Jeremiah wanted to know, “Why is God angry with me?” Mary was blessed with the honor of giving birth to the Messiah. She wondered why God had chosen her to bear His Son. She chose to do God’s work with joy. Finally, Jesus asked “Why?”. When Jesus was dying on the cross and had taken upon Himself all the guilt of all the sins of every person in the whole world, He was left alone. God is holy, and He cannot look upon sin. Therefore, God the Father turned His eyes away from His Son. For three hours it was lonely and dark for Jesus. He cried out, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46)

Job: Why was I ever born?

That is the question that filled Job's mind. Why? Over the next few verses, Job asked several questions in his longing to find out why.

"Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?" (Job 3:11) *Why, Job wanted to know, was I ever born alive. Why did I not die when I was born?*

"Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck?" (3:12) Job wondered, *Why did they not just leave me to die after I was born? Why did my mother hold me on her knees and feed me. It would have been better if I had just died. "For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest."* (3:13)

Job went on to describe what he thought it would be like to be dead, *"With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves."* (3:14) In Job's mind, it would be like going off to a private place, alone and away from noise, activity, and other people. He felt that the place of death would be a peaceful, quiet place.

"Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver." (3:15) Death would be a place with no worries, Job thought. He imagined it as somewhere that he would have no cares, no needs. He would be at ease, like rulers that had gold, and houses full of silver. He would never have want of anything.

"Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light." (3:16) *Perhaps, Job thought, it would have been better if I had not even made it to birth. Why did my mother not miscarry me before I was even old enough for her to know she was going to have a baby? Why did I grow big enough to be seen and remembered?*

Death, in Job's mind, was a way of escape, a way out of difficulty. *"¹⁷There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. ¹⁸There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor."* (3:17,18) In death, the wicked could not cause trouble. The prisoner would no longer toil under the oppressor. In death, one could be left alone and not tormented. Surely death was better than life.

Death is fair; it plays no favorites. *"The small and great are there."* (3:19a) The doors of death welcome all -- rich and poor, young and old, the lowest of society and the highest ruler. There is no discrimination in death. To Job, death was also a place of freedom. He declared that in death *"the servant is free from his master."* (3:19b)

Job began to wonder, *If death is better than life, why is God allowing me to live on still in misery?* Job longed for death, but it would not come to him. Surely he would be glad if he could only find the grave. But he could not find death because God had hedged him in. *"Wherefore,"* cried Job, *"is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; ²¹Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; ²²Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? ²³Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"* (3:20-23)

At this point Job's sufferings and sorrows were so overwhelming that death seemed very welcoming. He said, "²⁴*For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters.* ²⁵*For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.* ²⁶*I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.*" (3:24-26)

Job sighted before he ate. Was it time to eat again? Food held no attraction for him. He ate it because it was necessary. His pain was so great that he cried, his tears pouring out like water. He groaned with every move.

Job did not understand why all this had come upon him. It was the thing he had feared the most. How had it happened? He was not careless, just assuming that his family and property would be safe. He had things in order and kept watch. He prepared himself against trouble the best he knew how. Yet it came. Why had it come?

These longings and questions of Job are interesting to ponder. Some of his "Why?" questions seem rather harsh.

Why did I not die in the womb?

Why was I born alive?

Why did my mother hold me on her knees and feed me? Why did she not just let me die?

Was Job considering his mother when he asked these questions? Would she not be upset if she heard them? How could Job think she could have no feeling toward her baby boy? How could Job think she would neglect her son and let him starve? Surely she was a good mother and had done her best.

Perhaps, after voicing these questions, Job thought about his mother's feelings. He changed his question and asked, *Why was I not miscarried before my mother even knew she going to have a baby. Why did I not just come as an untimely birth, as though I had not been?* (See Job 3:16) If Job's mother had not know she was pregnant, she would not sorrow at his loss because she would not have know that she had lost him.

It is not that Job was inconsiderate of others. He just felt at that time that it would have been better if he had never grown up. As an infant, he would not have been old enough to remember trouble and sorrow. He would have no memory of it if he had died then. He wished he could erase the memory of it now.

Even though Job's statements were strong ones, they were not bitter statements. Job was not angry with God. He just did not understand why all these things were happening to him. God was not displeased with Job for asking "Why?". Nowhere in the book of Job does it say that God chided him for these questions or that it was sinful for him to ask them. They were not accusations against God. They were simply the wonderings of a hurting heart.

David: Why did I lose the love of my son and the love of the people of my kingdom?

The book of Psalms contains many instances in which David asked “Why?”. Psalm three tells one of those stories. Verses one and two of this Psalm say, “*LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. ²Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.*”

The word “why” is not used here, but the question is still asked. David wrote this Psalm when he fled from his son Absalom. Absalom turned the hearts of many in Israel away from his father and toward himself. The Bible says, “*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*” (II Samuel 15:6)

Through his wives, Absalom turned the love and admiration of Israel away from his father and toward himself. He took respect and loyalty that did not belong to him. Later, Absalom attempted to take the throne and the kingdom as well. As a result, David and all those who were loyal to him had to flee for their lives. (See II Samuel 15:10-23) There was much sorrow and weeping.

David wondered, *How did this happen? Why did my own son turn against me? Why do the people of my kingdom, whom I love, hate me? How did it come to be that there are so many that want to destroy me. They mock me, saying, “No one can help him now. Even God will not help him.”*

Yet, God did help him. Even though David was discouraged and sad and did not understand why all these things were happening, he knew he had a refuge in God. “*³But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. ⁴I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.*” (Psalm 3:3,4) David had a place of safety in God. Though he had been put to shame before his people, he had confidence before God. God was His glory, and God lifted up his head. He was not ashamed before God. He had prayed, and He knew God would answer.

David said, “*⁵I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. ⁶I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about... ⁸Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.*” (Psalm 3:5,6 and 8)

David asked “Why?”, but he was not angry or bitter against God. David did not understand why all this had come upon him, but he still trusted in God. Although he was afraid and confused, he clung to God, for his confidence was in the Lord God.

Elijah - Why am I All Alone in My Stand for God?

Victory on Mount Carmel

In I Kings 17, Elijah went to Ahab to tell him there was going to be a big drought. There would be neither dew nor rain for three years.

God sent Elijah to the brook Cherith where he stayed and was fed by ravens until the brook had dried up. After that, God sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath. There God miraculously provided for this widow, and she fed Elijah many days until the Lord sent rain again upon the earth.

When the three years were ended, God sent Elijah to go tell Ahab that it was going to rain. On the way there, Elijah met Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house. I Kings 18 explains that Obadiah feared God greatly. He had taken one hundred of the Lord's prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave. There he fed them bread and water. Obadiah did this at the risk of his own life. Most likely the food and water he used to feed these prophets came from the king's store. One does not lightly go into the storehouse of the king and take the king's substance to feed the king's enemies. Obadiah was a courageous man.

When Elijah met Obadiah, he asked him to go tell the king, "*Behold, Elijah is here.*" Obadiah was terrified! He knew that if he did this, and Elijah went and hid himself before Ahab came back to him, that Obadiah would be put to death. Nevertheless, he did as Elijah told him to do, once more risking his life to do the Lord's work. Ahab went out to meet Elijah, and Elijah told him to go gather all Israel and all the prophets of Baal and bring them together to Mount Carmel. Ahab went and did so.

There were 850 prophets of Baal. These all met together and selected a bullock for themselves and cut it in pieces and laid it on the altar with no fire under it. All morning long they called upon Baal,
"O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made." (18:26)

When there was no answer, Elijah began to mock them, saying, "*Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.*" (18:27)

So, they did as Elijah said, "*²⁸And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.*" (18:28,29)

Then Elijah called the people to come near to him. He repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down and took twelve stones and "*built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. ³³And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with*

water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. ³⁴And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. ³⁵And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

³⁶And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. ³⁷Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

³⁹And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. ⁴⁰And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.” (See verses 30 - 40)

What a victory! Elijah was so excited when the Lord showed the people that He alone was God. The people then confessed, “*The LORD, he is the God;*” and they caught the 850 prophets of Baal and brought them to Elijah. He took all the prophets to the brook Kishon and put them to death.

After this, Elijah sent Ahab home, telling him, “*Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.*” (18:41) So, Ahab got himself up to eat and drink while Elijah prayed. God heard the prayer of Elijah, and soon “*the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.*”

At Elijah’s word, Ahab prepared his chariot and raced home as fast as possible to Jezreel. “*And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.*” (18:46)

God had done another mighty miracle, and He had given Elijah supernatural strength. It must have seemed as if everything were going great. The people had declared that the LORD was God, the prophets of Baal were dead, and now it was raining. Life was good.

Discouragement and Fear

Elijah was unaware of this, but life was about to change. Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and that he had put all the prophets of Baal to death with the sword. Jezebel was furious. She “*sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.*” (19:2) Elijah’s happy world came crashing down upon him. All his excited hopes that the nation was now on the path to return to God were dashed, and he got up and fled for his life.

When Elijah got to Beersheba, he left his servant there and then went a day's journey into the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree. He was done; he was giving up. *"And he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."* (19:4b) Then he lay down and slept and waited for death to come.

As Elijah slept, an angel came and *"touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."* (19:5,6) Elijah was physically exhausted. This seemed to magnify the turmoil in his mind. The Lord knew this and allowed Elijah to eat, drink, and rest before dealing with his spiritual problems.

After Elijah slept a while longer, *"the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee."* (19:7) Now that Elijah had rested a while, God had something else for him to do. Elijah was depressed and wanted to quit, but God would not allow him to quit at this time. Rather, God was going to take Elijah on a journey so He could teach him some special things.

The food Elijah ate came from the angel of the LORD, or from God Himself, and it was very good food. It would give him strength for many days. Verses eight and nine say, *"^sAnd he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. ^oAnd he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there."*

Elijah went forty more days into the wilderness, up to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. But he did not go talk to God. He found a cave and set up his lodging there. Even after God's special care for him, Elijah was still upset. Perhaps he thought he could just hide away in this cave and die. He had tried the desert, but God sent him food and water. Now he was "hiding" in a cave. The only problem was that he was "hiding" in the mountain of God.

It was not long after he was settled in that *"the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?"* (19:9b) Elijah's depression had lasted more than forty days. God had given him special food and drink and special strength. Now God was going to take care of Elijah's spiritual needs. He went to talk to Elijah, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" Why was he hiding in a cave and just sitting around waiting to die?

Elijah answered, *"I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."* (19:10)

Elijah had been obedient; he had willingly served the Lord. He stood alone against 850 prophets of Baal. When the pressure was on after the victory on Mt. Carmel, no one stood with him. Elijah set his focus on these things, and he began to feel very alone. He had forgotten about Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, who had risked his life to hide one hundred prophets of God and feed them bread and water. Why were those prophets

hiding? Jezebel wanted to kill them. Here was Jezebel, the king's wife, trying to destroy the prophets of God; and all the while God was making sure these prophets were nourished with food and water from the king's own house. Elijah had forgotten that he had at least one hundred and one friends, one hundred of whom were hiding for the same reason he was hiding.

When God asked Elijah why he was in a cave on Mt. Horeb, Elijah poured out his complaint to God. He did not use the word "why," but the "why" was there. It as if her were saying, "I was faithful to You. I obeyed You. I stood alone for You. Why has all this happened to me? I spoke for you. What happened? Did people listen to You and follow You? No. They all left when the going got tough. Is this the reward I get for serving You? Everyone leaves me; and now I am alone, and they are trying to kill me!"

It seems that Elijah was angry as well as afraid. He was not asking the same kind of question "Why?" that Job had asked. Elijah had a bad attitude. However, he did one thing right. He poured out his heart to God and told him what was on his heart.

What was God's response? Was he angry with Elijah for his bad attitude? Did he chide Elijah for his lack of faith? Did He say, "If that is how you feel, Elijah, you might as well go ahead and quit. I have no place for deserters in My work?" No. God looked upon Elijah in pity as a father looks upon his children. He remembered that Elijah was but dust. Dust is frail and is easily blown around by the wind. It has no strength of its own. It is useless without some other power. (See Psalm 103:13,14)

We are like dust. We have no strength of our own. God made us and gives us life and breath and health each day. Our strength comes from Him. Without God we are useless, for without Him we can do nothing. (See John 15:5) God knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust and has compassion on us.

The way God dealt with Elijah reveals the vastness of God's love and mercy. In great tenderness, He showed Himself to Elijah and helped to turn Elijah's focus off himself and his troubles and back onto God.

"¹¹And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: ¹²And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. ¹³And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:11-13)

A Misplaced Focus

Throughout Elijah's ministry, he had seen the Lord do many miracles. God had used ravens to bring Elijah food at the brook Cherith during the famine. Later, He provided lodging for him with the widow of Zarephath and miraculously multiplied her food so that

it would last to the end of the famine. At Mt. Carmel, God sent fire down from heaven and devoured the water, the stones, and the burnt sacrifice Elijah had prepared. Soon after that, God caused rain to fall at the end of the three years of famine. Finally, as the rain began to fall, the hand of the Lord strengthened Elijah and gave him power and speed to outrun Ahab's chariot and get to Jezreel before Ahab.

Elijah had seen God do mighty and dramatic things. Perhaps he expected another miracle to take place when Ahab returned to Jezebel. Maybe he thought Jezebel would hear of God's great power and turn to Him and let all God's prophets go. Maybe God would strike her dead so that she could not lead Israel astray and persecute those who believed in God. Surely, things must get easier from here on out. But, no! Jezebel became furious. She blamed Elijah for all that had happened. This did not seem fair. Elijah had stood alone against the 850 prophets of Baal. He expected something good and wonderful to happen. Instead, he was running for his life. Elijah was very discouraged. He felt like his life was in vain. It seemed to him that all the work he had done for God had amounted to nothing. He was depressed and wanted to die.

When Elijah heard God speak to him in a still, small voice, he was afraid and wrapped his face in his mantle. Then he went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. He was afraid of God, but his attitude had not changed. While he stood there, God said to him, "*What doest thou here, Elijah?*"

"And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (19:14) This was the same answer Elijah had given to God the first time God asked him, "What doest thou here?" Elijah was still focused on himself and his problems. He felt very lonely. God saw his loneliness and pitied him. He assured Elijah, "*Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him*" (19:18) With compassion, God told Elijah, "You are not alone. You may not see them, but there are seven thousand in Israel who still love Me. They have not worshipped Baal. You are not alone."

Provision and Preparation of Elijah's Replacement

God saw that Elijah was getting weary in the work, and He prepared another man to learn from him and to take his place later. First, however, He tested Elijah's obedience by giving him a job to do. It was a tough job. God sent Elijah to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu to be king over Israel. Once again, Elijah had to put his life on the line. Anointing these two as kings while the other kings were still reigning could be considered treason. This was a very dangerous job. However, Elijah obeyed and did as God commanded. Elijah passed the test.

Then, God did something very special for Elijah. He sent him to anoint Elisha to be prophet in Elijah's stead. Elijah did this and Elisha "*arose, and went after Elijah, and*

ministered unto him." (19:21) God had given Elijah a companion and someone to take up Elijah's work after he was gone.

It seems that Elijah was still discouraged. It is not clear how long Elisha ministered to him before he was able to do public service for the Lord again. Nothing more is mentioned of Elijah until the middle of chapter twenty-one. In the meantime, God sent other prophets to talk to Ahab and to help the children of Israel. Once Elijah began his public ministry again, he was able to serve until the Lord took him to Heaven in a chariot of fire with horses of fire. These parted Elijah and Elisha asunder, "*and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*" (II Kings 2:11)

Elisha was very sad after Elijah was gone, but he wasted no time in filling his master's place and fulfilling the ministry God had called him to do.

This story is both sad and happy. It is the story of a man who got discouraged and gave up. Although God allowed him to work for Him again, the enthusiasm and power that was there at the beginning of Elijah's ministry never returned. Elijah seemed to remain a weary worker. But, Elijah still loved God. God had compassion on him and raised up a man who would take his place and serve with fresh enthusiasm and a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elisha was able to take over his ministry with a new zeal and the mighty power of God upon his life!

Jeremiah: Why is God Angry with Me?

Jeremiah's sorrow over Israel's trouble

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. He wrote out his weeping in the book of Lamentations. His heart was torn with sorrow as he saw the dreadful state of his people. False prophets had deceived them, and they forsook the Lord their God. God sent them His prophets, but they refused to hear them or obey them. Israel was oppressed by her enemies. The house of the LORD was destroyed and the solemn feasts and sabbaths were forgotten. Children were starving and crying to their mothers as they fainted in the streets and then died in their mother's arms. Jeremiah saw Zion, the perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth, become a place of humiliation where the elderly women sat on the ground, put dust upon their heads, and girded themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem hung down their heads with shame.

Jeremiah knew that all this was come upon Israel because they had turned their backs on God. He said, "*The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries.*" (Lamentations 2:17)

Although Israel had rejected God and were reaping what they had sown, Jeremiah had pity upon his people. He said, "*Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people.*" (2:11a)

The trouble that came upon Israel did not affect the wicked only. Jeremiah himself suffered greatly. He was affected by the oppression and shortages of food, and he was severely persecuted for standing for the Lord and speaking His word to the people. They shut him up in prison; and, at one point, they even threw him in a dungeon that had quick sand in it. Jeremiah began to sink and was afraid he would suffocate and die. However, Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, spoke to the king for Jeremiah. Then he found some rotten rags and rounded up some men to help him. They threw the rags down to Jeremiah. He put the rags under his arm pits, and they pulled him out. After that Jeremiah "abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was there when Jerusalem was taken." (See Jeremiah 38)

Jeremiah's fear and loneliness

It seems that Lamentations was written about the time Jeremiah was pulled out of the dungeon. As he writes chapter three, Jeremiah relives the dreadful experience of his time in the dungeon and begins to ask "Why?". Verses one through nineteen describe Jeremiah's experience and the fear that he faced.

"*I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.*" (Lamentations 3:1)
Jeremiah had seen the affliction that had come upon Israel because of God's anger over their sin. God was pouring out His wrath upon them.

“²He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. ³Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. ⁴My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. ⁵He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. ⁶He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.” (3:2-6)

Down in the dungeon it was very dark. It was also full of mire, in which Jeremiah began to sink. His bones were broken. Had he been beaten, or did his bones break when he was thrown down into the dungeon? Perhaps it was a long way down to the miry pit. The walls were very high around him, and he could not get out.

Oh, how dark it was in that dungeon! like a grave! One shivers with the imagination that the mire was full of the bones of many who had been cast in before him. They had either drowned in the mire or starved to death.

Why was Jeremiah in the dungeon? He felt that God must have led him there. Like Job, he thought his affliction had come from God. No wonder he was frightened and sad. He thought God had turned against him in His wrath, and he did not know why. Oh, how deep was the darkness Jeremiah experienced!

“⁷He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy. ⁸Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. ⁹He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.” (3:7-9)

One of the things that really bothered Jeremiah about living in prison was the confinement. He was closed in on every side, and he could not go in and out as he pleased. A heavy chain restrained him so that he could not wander at leisure. When he was allowed out of his cell, all the paths he went down were enclosed in hewn stone? *Why had God shut him in, he wondered. Where was God. Did God care?* It seemed to Jeremiah that God had shut him in and had shut out his prayer. Jeremiah felt that God was not even listening to his prayer, that God was purposely ignoring him. “Why am I left all alone in this place of suffering?” Jeremiah wanted to know.

“¹⁰He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. ¹¹He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. ¹²He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. ¹³He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins. ¹⁴I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day.” (3:10-14)

Jeremiah was confused about all that was going on. He felt that God had singled him out to pick on him. He imagined God as a bear or as a lion lurking in secret places, waiting for him to come around the corner. “Pounce! I got you! Now you are in my clutches, and you can’t get away!”

Jeremiah also imagined God as an archer setting him up and putting a mark on him. Then God was taking his arrows out of His quiver and shooting at him. All of the arrows hit their mark - Jeremiah’s reins, or his innermost parts.

These were vivid imaginations, and, of course, they were not accurate. However, in his great suffering and loneliness, Jeremiah was not seeing God's mercy and kindness. He was focused on his circumstances. Jeremiah was in prison, in pain, alone, and very hungry. Also, he was the laughing stock of all the people, who mocked him and made up derisive songs about him. All day long he suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It seemed to him that no one cared, not even God.

“He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. ¹⁶He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.” (3:15,16)

As far as Jeremiah could see, his situation was hopeless. There was no way out of it. Things would always go on like this and would never change. God had filled his cup with wormwood, a bitter, poisonous drink; and Jeremiah must take it all. God had laid upon him hard things, things that broke him. Jeremiah said these things broke his teeth. This symbolizes that his strength was gone. When an old lion would lose its teeth, it could not eat. Soon its strength was gone, and it faced certain death. Jeremiah felt like an old lion. All his strength was gone, and he had no hope.

“And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. ¹⁸And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD.” (3:17,18)

Jeremiah had no peace in his soul. His country was being torn apart by the enemy, and the people blamed him for this. Now he was in prison -- empty, alone, hungry, in pain, and useless. All the good things he used to have were gone. In his misery, he forgot what it was like to be prosperous.

Jeremiah had no more will to go on; he had lost hope. He felt that the Lord had forsaken him and that there was no more reason to keep on. Even the Lord would not help him now. *“My hope is perished from the Lord,”* he said. He had no more spiritual strength.

“Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. ²⁰My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.” (Lamentations 3:19,20)

Jeremiah's memory was filled with recollections of his suffering and misery. Oh, the bitter wormwood and the gall! His mind recalled the awful taste and how sick he felt after he drank it. These memories brought him very low. His soul was cast down within him. Yet, in the midst of all this suffering and these horrible memories, Jeremiah remembered something, something that gave him a glimmer of hope.

Jeremiah's hope

“²¹This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. ²²It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ²³They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. ²⁴The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.” (3:21-24)

A flicker of hope cheered Jeremiah as He remembered that the Lord is merciful. He is full of compassion. Every morning, God's compassions for His people are new and fresh. Man is sinful, but God is faithful, and His faithfulness is great. Though Israel was in dire straits from the awful things they suffered at the hands of their enemies, they were not consumed. Many had died, yet the Lord had not destroyed the whole nation. They deserved to be destroyed because of their sin, but God had promised to preserve them for ever; and God was faithful to keep that promise. In His mercy, He left a remnant of the people.

Jeremiah knew that this merciful God was his God. Jeremiah was in trouble, but God was with him in trouble. Remembering this, he said, "*The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*"

"²⁵The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. ²⁶It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." (3:25,26)

It was hard for Jeremiah to see God's goodness in these trials, but he knew God was good. There were several ways in which God showed His mercy to Jeremiah. Perhaps Jeremiah had broken some bones when he was cast into the dungeon (See verse 4), but many of the people of Israel had been slain with the sword. (2:21) Jeremiah was hungry, but the Lord provided bread and water for him until all the bread in the city was gone. (See Jeremiah 37:21) Many of the Israelites died of starvation, but Jeremiah was preserved. Also, many of the Israelites were carried away captive when Nebuchadnezzar came in and captured the city. However, Jeremiah was taken out of prison and allowed to dwell among the people that Nebuchadnezzar had left in the land. Nebuchadnezzar commanded Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, to look after Jeremiah and make sure no harm came to him. (See Jeremiah 39:10-14) Jeremiah placed his hope in the Lord and waited on Him, and he rejoiced to see the salvation of the Lord in his deliverance from his trouble. Jeremiah sought the Lord, and the Lord was good to him.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus: Why Me?

Mary's Assignment

Mary was a virgin, espoused to a man named Joseph, who was of the house of David. Mary was a special virgin, although she did not know it. She was the one God had chosen to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, “*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*” (See also Matthew 1:23.)

Joseph was a just man who feared God and loved Mary, and Mary was humble and chaste. She had kept herself pure for Joseph. One day God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to give her a special message.

“²⁸And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. ²⁹And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. ³⁰And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. ³¹And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. ³²He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: ³³And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. ³⁴Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? ³⁵And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. ³⁷For with God nothing shall be impossible. ³⁸And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:28-38)

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, she became frightened. Why had he come? It was not very common for people to see angels. Now here was Gabriel, God’s messenger angel, in her home. What could this mean? Gabriel comforted Mary and told her not to be afraid. She had found favor in God’s eyes, and He was going to give her a special son, Jesus. This special child would be great and would be called the Son of the Highest and also the Son of God. God would give Jesus the throne of David, and Jesus would sit upon this throne and rule over a kingdom that would have no end.

These things were hard to understand. What did the angel mean? How could she have a baby? She was a virgin and had never known a man. The angel explained to her that the Holy Ghost would come upon her. He would overshadow Mary with His power and put the baby inside her. That is why the baby would be called the Son of God.

The angel told Mary that God had also helped Elisabeth, Mary’s cousin, to become pregnant. Elisabeth was barren for many years, and now she was considered to be too old to have a child. In people’s eyes, there was no chance of her having a baby. But God can do what seems impossible. He is able to do anything, and he helped Elisabeth to get pregnant. The angel reminded Mary that with God nothing shall be impossible.

Humbly Mary accepted the message from the angel and said, “*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.*” (verse 38)

One can just imagine the excitement and fear that must have overwhelmed Mary when she heard this news. “*Why me?*” she must have thought. “*Why would God choose me to bear His Son? Oh, I must keep myself holy! Oh, I must do right!*”

“*Oh, what will Joseph think? I am a chaste virgin, and Joseph knows that. But when he sees I am pregnant, he will think I was unfaithful to him. He can put me away. He can even have me stoned. Oh, what will I do? Why did this have to happen to me?*”

“*What will all my family say? And won’t the older women talk? No one will believe me when I say that the Holy Ghost made me pregnant. They will laugh and think I am crazy or lying or both.*”

“*What if Joseph does believe me? What if he still takes me to be his wife? Everyone will think he has made me pregnant. They will think that he is not a strong enough man to wait for marriage. They will think he is unclean too. Oh, why is this happening to me?*”

“*No, I must not think this way. I am God’s handmaid. This is His Son. God will take care of His Son. The angel said God did the impossible for Elisabeth. He can do the impossible for me as well. Maybe I should go see Elisabeth and talk to her about this.*” So, Mary left and went in haste to visit her cousin, who lived in the hill country.

Mary’s Joy

As soon as Mary greeted Elisabeth, the babe leaped in Elisabeth’s womb. Why did the baby leap? He leaped for joy. The Holy Ghost filled Elisabeth, and she said, “*43Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*” (Luke 1:43-45)

Elisabeth was overjoyed. Mary was going to have a baby, and it was going to be the Lord! God had given Mary a great privilege and a great responsibility.

This was just the assurance Mary needed. “*46And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 48For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. 49For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.*” (verses 46-49)

A mix of fear and joy must have overwhelmed Mary. Why would God choose her, a poor woman, to be the mother of His Son? It was more than she could fathom. God had done to her great things, and she would be thankful. He was God, He was holy; and He had looked upon her to choose her to do a work that would make her known to all generations for the rest of time. She was to be the mother of the Messiah. Both Mary and her cousin Elisabeth rejoiced and wondered at this marvelous work of God. “*Why me? I do not know, but I am God’s handmaid, and I will do His work with joy!*”

Jesus - My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

These words were spoken by Jesus, the Son of God and the Lord of lords. Why would He speak these words?

Jesus the Messiah comes

Many years ago, in the little town of Bethlehem, Jesus was born. His birth was a fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah. *"²²Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ²³Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."* (Matthew 1:22,23)

God had spoken these words many years before through the prophet Isaiah, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14)

As Jesus grew, his mother marveled at Him. Jesus was like no other child. He did not complain, talk back, or disobey. He knew how to read, though He had never been taught letters. When He was only twelve years old, He sat with the "doctors" in the temple, *"both hearing them, and asking them questions."* (See Luke 2:46)

There was never a time that Jesus broke the law; He followed it perfectly. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."* Though Jesus was often tempted, He never did wrong. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus *"was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."*

Jesus brings salvation

Why had Jesus come to this earth? Why leave Heaven, where angels ministered to Him and heavenly creatures bowed before Him every day? Why leave the place where He was served and worshipped and come to a place where He must serve and where He would be ridiculed and mocked? Why leave the world of light and come to dwell in a world of sin and darkness? Why did Jesus do all this? Because He loved us and came to save us from our sin. John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Jesus came into the world for our sake. He said, *"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10)

How did Jesus provide salvation for us? He did it on the cross. I Peter 2:21-24 says, *"Christ also suffered for us... ²²Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: ²³Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: ²⁴Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."*

Jesus suffers

Christ's suffering began before He got to the cross. On the night He was betrayed, He ate the Passover with His disciples. There He served them and girded Himself with a towel and washed their feet. When it came time to eat, He told His disciples that the one to whom He gave the sop was the man who would betray Him. This man was Judas, one of the twelve. (See John 13:21-30) Jesus suffered the heartache of betrayal by a friend, a friend with whom He had eaten and who had been with Him for more than three years.

Jesus was also heavy of heart because He knew that all His disciples would soon desert Him. Peter would deny Him, and the other disciples would all flee. Jesus would have to go through His suffering alone. When friends desert us during times of trouble, that makes our sorrows even harder to bear. But we have one Friend who will not leave us, and that is Jesus. Jesus knows what it is like to be left alone. His disciples left Him. However, if we place our faith and trust in Jesus, He will never leave us nor forsake us. He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced even more sorrow. When He and his disciples came to the garden, He told His disciples, "*Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*" (Matthew 26:36) then he took with Him Peter and James and John. But Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy. "³⁸*Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.* ³⁹*And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*" (verses 38,39)

Upon reading these verses, one can almost feel the agony of heart Jesus was enduring. Surely His friends would support Him in His sorrow. But wait! What were they doing when Jesus came back to them? Sleeping. Twice more Jesus prayed in agony of spirit. His suffering was so intense that He sweat and his sweat "*was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*" (See Luke 22:44) Yet, His disciples slept on. God did not leave Jesus though. He sent an angel unto Him from heaven to strengthen Him. (See verse 23)

The next sorrow was soon to fall heavily upon Jesus. "⁴⁵*And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,* ⁴⁶*And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.* ⁴⁷*And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.* ⁴⁸*But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"* (Luke 22:45-48) Judas, a man Jesus loved, a disciple who walked with Jesus for three years, was now the man who betrayed Him. Jesus knew this would happen, but He still felt the pain of the betrayal.

We wonder why - why would a man into whom Jesus had poured His heart, His time, and His love, betray Him? Why? These events were also fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy. (See Psalm 109 and Acts 1:20) For Jesus' love, Judas showed enmity. When Jesus' heart was broken, Judas showed no mercy but persecuted Him. In fact, Judas betrayed Him into the hands of those who would put Him to death.

Is your heart broken? Jesus knows what it is like to have a broken heart. Did your friends forsake you in sorrow? Did those you love add to your sorrow? Jesus knows what it is like to be forsaken in sorrow. Lean on Jesus, rest on His bosom. Trust in Him. He can help you in your sorrow, for He has gone before you and partaken of it first.

Jesus is forsaken

After Jesus was betrayed, He was led away to the high priest's house. Peter followed afar off. He went into the hall and sat down near the fire. As he sat there, a maid looked upon him and said, "*This man was also with him.*" But Peter "*denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.*" Twice more Peter was asked if he were with Christ. Twice more Peter denied Him. (See Luke 22:54-62) Why? Why would one of Jesus' own disciples deny Him when He was in trouble. This was the disciple that had declared, "*Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*" (verse 33) Now Peter claimed he had no association with Jesus. Peter was part of the inner circle. He had gone up to the mountain and had seen Jesus transfigured. There Jesus had stood before him, shining in all His glory! Now Peter declared he did not even know Him.

All of the other disciples also fled and left Jesus to suffer and die alone. Jesus endured an unfair trial and was unjustly accused of wrongdoing and sentenced to die. He was mocked and scourged and buffeted. His beard was plucked out. Truly, He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. (See Isaiah 53:2)

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him...."
(Luke 23:33)

"⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45,46)

Why? The true, heartfelt why! Why had God forsaken Him? God forsook Him because Jesus was bearing all our sins in His own body on the cross. The LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (See Isaiah 53:6) Because God is holy, He cannot tolerate the presence of sin. He must turn His back upon it, and He must punish it. God was afflicting Jesus because of our sin - your sin and my sin. Jesus experienced the greatest loneliness, heartache, and emptiness because God His Father had turned His back on Him. He had never been separated from His Father before. But He experienced this separation so that you and I would have the opportunity to experience reconciliation with the Father.

Jesus' victory

Jesus did all this on the cross for us so that we might have redemption from our sin through Jesus' blood. Because Jesus bore our sins on the cross and suffered the punishment for them, we can receive forgiveness and cleansing for our sin. When we believe in Jesus and love Him and trust in Him, God the Father will love us and will come into our hearts and dwell there with Jesus. (See John 14:23) Jesus also seals us and gives us the earnest of

the Holy Spirit in our hearts. (See I Corinthians 1:22) The Holy Spirit helps us to remember that a wonderful time is coming in which we will lay down our earthly garments and put on heavenly garments. Our mortality will be swallowed up in life. (I Corinthians 1:1-5)

Jesus is able to give us life because He was victorious on the cross. After He finished bearing the guilt and punishment of our sins, He cried out, "*It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*" (John 19:30b) After this, He was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (See I Corinthians 15:3,4) Because of this, we can know that, if we die in Christ, we will rise again. "*Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (I Corinthians 15:57)

We no longer need to fear death because death is swallowed up in victory! And we no longer need to fear living because our Saviour is with us always, and He promised, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Hebrews 13:5b) God the Father forsook Jesus for a brief time on the cross so that we who believe in Jesus can experience His presence with us forever. He will never leave us nor forsake us -- not in this world, nor for all eternity. Since Jesus is my Saviour, I am His and He is mine -- for ever!