

Why!

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1 Kings 11:9-13

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I grew up in a time when we lived in fear of the Soviet Union (or Russia). I vividly remember not just the fire drills in school, but also the Bomb Drills. We were told a Nuclear bomb blast could come at any moment, without warning (which made me wonder how "Duck & Cover" was going to save me). Stupid Russians, I thought. Why'd they have to go and make our life so miserable? But what I didn't know at the time was that even some Russian citizens were living a pretty miserable life themselves. They too were wondering why the government was making life difficult.

When the Bolsheviks took power in October of 1917, Atheism became the religion of the state. And the attacks against the church were not just spiritual. Many church buildings were destroyed and many clergy simply disappeared.

A Russian Pastor named Ivan was serving a church during the rule of Joseph Stalin. He was shipped off to Siberia with 1500 other religious and political prisoners. And Ivan spent the next 10 years in prison. Perhaps Ivan wondered why God was asking him to endure this ordeal.

I run into a lot of people who wonder why. They look at their circumstances and figure God is out to destroy them; He must hate them. But there is a huge difference between God's anger and hate; a difference we Christians need to learn; a difference Solomon ends up learning, but only after a confrontation with God.

(Read 1 Kings 11:9-13). The text goes on to tell of Hadad and Rezon, adversaries that God put in place because of Solomon's disobedience. How do you suppose Solomon took this news? Although there is no Psalm to turn to, I believe Solomon spent the last few years of his life wrestling with what God said; about the fact that he had made God angry.

Adversity, hardships, and trials have a way of making us stop for a moment and take a long, hard look at our lives. I know some who shake their fist defiantly at God and shout "I hate you too!" But if God really hated you, you wouldn't be here today. Oh sure, God hates the THINGS we do, but not us. God could have made Solomon vanish in a moment; forgotten just as quickly as Shutrak Nahunte. No, God did not Hate Solomon. He was angry with the man, yes, but He did not hate him.

So how did Solomon react to this news? He probably went back to his bed chamber sulking. He probably couldn't get any sleep that night because he was sick from worry. And I doubt he got any sympathy from his wives. Solomon's life of peace and prosperity falls apart. And he can't find sympathy anywhere. The cry of "Why!" echoes down the long central hallway in the palace; his pain mocked by the gold shields hanging upon the wall. He broods at the dinner table while a great feast sets before him. It all seems so senseless now. I imagine he even thought of taking his life.

Things were no different for two guys named BEZALEL [BEZ uh lel] and OHOLIAB [o HOLE ih ab]. They were slaves living in Egypt. According to Exodus the Egyptians worked them hard. They were forced at the end of a whip to build cities and palaces while the Egyptians stood by and killed them without mercy. In the midst of this, the cry of "Why" echoed up and down the Nile. Like Solomon, these two men perhaps wondered why. Why were they experiencing these hardships? Why was God making life so difficult? And I'm wondering, have you ever found yourself asking the same question?

Something happens to Solomon though. Something begins to change after God confronts the man and sends adversaries his way. Maybe he picked up that scroll and started reading it again, I don't know. But I do know that through this hardship, God was preparing Solomon to write one more book that would have a huge effect on the eternal lives of people like you and me.

When God sent adversaries his way, when Solomon finally faced some hardships, he realized how vain and foolish his life had truly been. And the result of these few years of pondering is the book we know as Ecclesiastes. Any man who sets down and writes "Let me tell you what truly matters in life" is a man who has faced hardship and adversity. Through this adversity; through these trials and hardships, God was preparing Solomon for one final shot at glorifying God.

In the same way, what Bezalel and Oholiab endured while facing back-breaking work was devastating. Yet during this time they learned a skill; a skill that would go with them as they left the land of Egypt. Then one day, as Moses stood

before God on the mountain, we find out that what they endured in hardship was merely preparation for something glorious. (Read Exodus 31:1-6).

Bezalel and Oholiab had no idea what God was doing to them. They had no clue that He was sharpening a tool that He would use one day to bless a nation. I suspect Solomon had no idea that through these adversaries; through this discipline of God, that he would pen a book which would affect the lives of people for eternity. Countless people were blessed because these men endured a time that made them wonder "Why".

Okay, you're probably thinking. This is all Old Testament Bible stuff. What about the real world? Let me finish the story about Ivan. While in prison, Ivan had the occasional opportunity to meet with other Christian prisoners. Later on, Ivan and a few other prisoners were sent to do carpentry work in the villages surrounding the camp. As they interacted with the townspeople, small fellowships began to form. Soon, the townspeople accepted Christ. And today there is a small church in that village where Ivan worked. In fact, there are churches all over Siberia today because of faithful servants of God who probably wondered "why" while facing difficulties, hardships, and suffering. God used their present hardships to prepare them for a future glory.

The story of Ivan is rather dramatic. But the truth is that God does this all the time. Sure, there are times when the mess we're in is because we've done something stupid. But the lesson of Solomon tells me that there are also times when God will put us through a trial just to sharpen us; to refine us into an instrument approved for His work. And He will not waste the trouble or adversity you have endured.

I know all about the sleepless nights and the incessant worry. So do you. Many of us have cried out to God asking why. What we are forced to endure makes no sense to us at all. Maybe, just maybe, God is refining you; sharpening you for something glorious; something you've never even imagined. He just might be preparing you today for tomorrow's glory. He is refining you so that one day you may honor Him through your faith and your service.