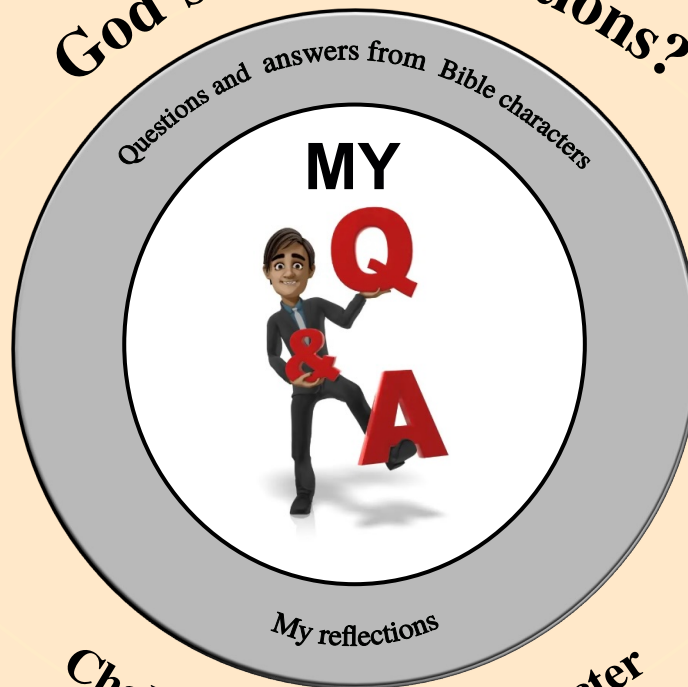


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## God's "why" questions?



Challenging human character

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## Introduction

This MyQ&A 10 paper investigates some of God's "why" questions. Why would God, or man, ask "why" questions? In the first MyQ&A paper, *The art of asking questions*, I said that the purpose was to get the right answers. Accordingly, I suggested, questions may be *investigative*, *interpretive*, or *evaluative*. Specifically, *investigative* or exploratory questions determine what are the facts. Then *interpretive* questions seek to understand the facts, explain what the facts mean that can be supported with evidence from the facts. *Evaluative* questions seek to determine the importance of the facts.

On the basis of the above paradigm, then "why" questions are in the *interpretive* category seeking to understand the facts, explain what the facts mean that can be supported with evidence from the facts. I've selected a few of God's "why" questions directed to we human beings about their characters and personalities. Character is a local concept. It's part of us but not all of us including our physical, emotional, mental, moral, ethical, moral, and social qualities, beliefs and values. On the other hand, personality is a global concept. It's everything of a person including behaviors, interests, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, that make each of us unique in the world. It's "you". It's "me". Personality expresses our character ([Gillette](#)).

Here, then, are five examples of God's "why" questions directed at individuals and nations.

### 1 Anger

*But with Cain and his offering he was not pleased. So Cain became very angry, and his expression was downcast (Genesis 4:4).*

*Lord said to Cain: "Why are you angry, and why is your expression downcast? (Genesis 4:6).*

Cain blazed up, burned hot with anger towards the Lord for the morally discerning way He looked with favor on Abel's sacrifice yet He looked at Cain's offering with stern refusal. Nevertheless, the Lord gave Cain an off ramp to his downcast face. He promised, "If you do well, uplifting", the opposite of his fallen face. God will show him favor, he will not be angry, and his face will reflect that. Of course, there was a warning: "If you do not do well, sin is crouching..." Not doing well leads to sinful attack; doing well leads to victory and God's blessing (Net Bible Notes). Cain chose the not doing well option.

Anger is an emotion, part of our character's makeup that is a response to perceived threats, injustices, or frustration. [Fernandez](#) says that there are 10 common types of anger, and Cain's anger seemed to compose a few of these. Firstly, Cain perhaps feels that God has been unjust to him in rejecting his sacrifice and his *judgmental anger* was reaction to this perceived injustice. Secondly, Cain's *retaliatory anger* against Abel was an instinctual response to God's rejection because He could take no action against Him anyway and his anger needed an outlet. It's one of the most common types of anger, and is motivated by revenge for a perceived wrong. Thirdly, *behavioural anger* is a choice to react physically toward the feeling of anger, and in Cain's case was at the very extreme end of the spectrum with violent murder.

Cain's story doesn't end here, for the New Testament offers three commentaries on him that are damning for the first man born into this world. They are his worship, his works, and his way. Let's briefly consider all three.

*1. Cain's worship. By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice separate from Cain, through which he was well reported of as being righteous (Hebrew 11:4). 'Well reported of' (martureo) means being the embodiment of righteousness, not just a verbalisation of it.*

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**1. Cain's worship continued.** The writer to the Hebrews makes a distinction, a separation between the two sacrifices. He creates an image of alienation. Abel's worship of God was from a righteous man of faith. Alongside, was Cain's worship sacrifice from a unrighteous man of no faith. But they were poles apart. With Abel and his offering God was pleased; with Cain and his offering He was not pleased. Notice the order in which Moses wrote them - the man first and his offering second. The Lord looked at the spiritual qualities of the man first and by them assessed the man's offering, not the other way around as is often asserted.

**2. Cain's works.** For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was out of the evil one and butchered his brother. And for what reason did he butcher him? Because his **works** were evil, and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:11-12).

'Evil' (*poneros*) is an antagonistic quality or behaviour that reduces and debases, or hinders and impedes someone.

**3. Cain's way.** Woe to them! For they have gone **the way of Cain...**(Jude 11).

'Way' (*hodos*) is common Greek word for road or street, but is also used in the sense of a way of thinking, which is more suited to the context here. Jesus applied the word (*hodos*) to Himself when He called himself the Way to the Father (John 14:6). 'Woe' is probably onomatopoeic which is the spelled out versions of the sound someone makes when informally expressing grief or pain. The way of Cain is without personal faith and God's righteousness, and anyone who doesn't follow his way is an enemy to be destroyed.

## 2 Laughing

***Yahweh to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh (tsachaq), saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a son, when I am so old?' (Genesis 18:13).***

'Laugh' (*tsachaq*) expresses the idea of playful teasing, specifically of a husband and wife during a time of intimacy as the husband caresses his wife. He is teasing her, being playful with her, and making her happy and joyful. Moreover, it is where the name Isaac originates. Isaac was named after this moment of laughter, this moment of God playfully teasing Sarah, making her joyful and happy, the joy and pleasure one feels when being caressed, cherished, and loved. At that very moment, Sarah's laughter was born out of a sense of joy over being loved and cherished by God ([Chaim Bentorah](#)).

Sarah senses a thrill on hearing that she would bear a child. She was laughing out of pure joy but at the same time just thinking it was just too wonderful to be true thinking: "Oh if only it were true."

Sometimes God will do things for us and we just sit in awe and think: "Can it really be, this is just too wonderful?"

## 3 Jealousy

***Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed (Numbers 12:8-9).***

Miriam takes the lead and together with Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married. She was an Egyptian or Ethiopian woman. As Miriam had safeguarded Moses in Egypt in his early years (Exodus 2), it may be that she was envious of the Cushite woman who was now more important in Moses' life than Miriam. She raises a racial issue, a lower level matter, as leverage for a higher level one, namely her opportunity to regain status as being just as important mouthpiece for God in the nation as her younger brother.

God wasn't having this blatant power grab succeed so he smote Miriam with leprosy, and in disgrace she was shut out from the camp for seven days.

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## 4 Rebellion

*Why do you strive against me? You have all rebelled against me, says the Lord (Jeremiah 2:29).*

What a change had come over the people of Jerusalem! The Lord had fond memories of there devotion to Him in their early years (Jeremiah 2:2). But, they rebelled. They broke away from His just authority; they strayed so far from Him and paid allegiance to worthless idols, and so became worthless to the Lord (2:5). Further, when the Lord brought them into a fertile land to enjoy, they defiled it, and made the land loathsome to the Lord (2:7).

Moreover, the priests and rulers rebelled against to the Lord, and so did the prophets who prophesied in the name of the god Baal -they all worshiped idols that could not help them (2:8). That is, the Lord's people exchanged Him, their glorious God, for a god that cannot help them at all (2:11).

Consequently, Jerusalem's wickedness and unfaithful acts will bring about their punishment. Discipline will come down discipline on them, and they will realise how utterly harmful it was for them to reject the Lord, the Lord their God, to show no respect to Him (2:14, 19).

Indeed, long ago Jerusalem threw off God's authority and refused to be subject to Him and serve Him. Additionally, the Lord had given up on punishing them because they did not respond to such correction (2:30). But, they had better watch out, because the Lord promised to bring down judgment on them (2:35).

How sad, that His once devoted people were now the departed people. Jerusalem's case is a salutary reminder to churches too, for the Lord challenged Ephesus with this: *I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent (Revelation 2:4-5).*

## 5 Fear

*"I, I am the one who consoles you. Why are you afraid of mortal men, of mere human beings who are as short-lived as grass? Why do you forget the Lord, who made you, who stretched out the sky and founded the earth? Why do you constantly tremble all day long at the anger of the oppressor, when he makes plans to destroy? Where is the anger of the oppressor? (Isaiah 51:12-13).*

Fear is the final emotion that I want to consider in this paper, and *fear of man* (v12) goes hand in hand with *forgetting the Lord* (v13). The latter causes the former. By forgetting the Lord, Israel were forgetting the source of their consolation and comfort.

The oppressor, the compressor, the constrainer of Israel is earmarked for judgment. The Lord says that He is ready to vindicate, ready to deliver (v5), and His deliverance is permanent and His vindication will not be shattered (v6). Accordingly, He encourages, 'don't be afraid of the insults of men; don't be discouraged because of their abuse' (v7).

Why? Didn't the arm of the Lord in former times smash the Proud One and wound the sea monster? (v9). Sometimes, the "proud one" is translated as a proper name (Rahab), and used here of a symbolic sea monster, known elsewhere in the Bible as Leviathan. This sea creature symbolises the forces of chaos that seek to destroy the created order. In the Bible "the Proud One" opposes God's creative work, but is defeated (see Job 26:12; Ps 89:10). Here the title refers to Pharaoh's Egyptian army that opposed Israel at the Red Sea (51:10: see also Isaiah 30:7 and Psalm 87:4, where the title is used of Egypt) (Net Bible Notes).

This text has a happy ending for *the Lord will console Zion (v3), and those whom the Lord has ransomed will return; they will enter Zion with a happy shout. Unending joy will crown them, happiness and joy will overwhelm them; grief and suffering will disappear (v11).* Fear will, indeed, be gone.



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## Conclusion

Our takeaways from this paper are:

1. We noted at the start that “why” questions are *interpretive*, seeking to understand the facts, explain what the facts mean supported with evidence. “Why” questions seek reasons, or motivations for what we do.
2. I selected four emotions and one behaviour from the Hebrew Bible.
3. The first was anger, an emotional response to perceived threats, injustices, or frustration. Cain felt that God was unjust to him in rejecting his sacrifice and his anger was reaction to this perceived injustice. He took it out on Abel physically. God’s offered him a way out, but he was bent on his path of murder. Sarah’s joy at hearing the news of having a child was the opposite emotion. Miriam’s jealousy was not successful, earning her the judgment of God. The fourth emotion was fear, and the text noted that *forgetting* the Lord preceded the *fear of man*. Finally, the people of Jerusalem once were devoted to the Lord but, rebelled. They broke away from His just authority.
4. Did anyone answer God’s question “why”? Cain didn’t. Sarah replied with a denial of her laughing but the Lord call her out on it. Miriam and Aaron didn’t, but Moses graciously acknowledged that ‘we have acted foolishly and have sinned’. Like Sarah, the Lord’s people Israel were in denial, and wouldn’t face the truth.

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