"Sunday Adelaja has done it again, courageously explaining one of life's greatest mysteries. I question whether there has ever been a book written like it before!"
— DEREK SCHNEIDER, PRESIDENT OF HISTORY MAKERS ACADEMY

MYLES MUNROE



. . . Finding Answers to Why Good People Die Tragic and Early Deaths

SUNDAY ADELAJA

. . . Finding Answers to Why Good People Die
Tragic and Early Deaths

What Others Are Saying
about This book

Pastor Adelaja's passion for life and death shines through in this tribute to Dr. Myles Munroe. Here he looks death in the face and gives the church hope. He takes the one subject that is so misunderstood by this modern narcissistic generation and opens the door to truly comprehending what lies beyond for the faithful. If that were all he did this book would be wonderful. Pastor Adelaja, however, goes to the next level and shows us how to live with the understanding that Dr. Munroe so clearly lived by, the understanding that we are each called to fulfill our purpose in this life and "die empty." Herein lies the freedom to truly live a life worthy of our Lord and Savior. Thank you, Pastor Adelaja for working through the pain to show us a better way--the way! Like Dr. Munroe, let's all fulfill our destiny and leave the graveyards of the world empty of everything but the dust of these shells we temporarily call home!

Joel Thornton
President and General Counsel
International Human Rights Group

Sunday Adelaja's book, "MYLES MUNROE . . . Finding Answers to why Good People die tragic and early deaths" is a masterpiece! I question whether there has ever been a book written like it before. It is not only a sobering understanding, of how we as believers should view death. It is a heartfelt tribute and thorough analysis of a true Kingdom General of our generation - Dr. Myles Munroe.

Other than Jesus, Sunday Adelaja may be the first to ever "answer" the question of life and death so accurately, thoroughly, and biblically. This book dares to uncover the glorious truth regarding the mystery of death, and at the same time makes you want to jump up and make the very most of your day!

The questions surrounding the premature or tragic death of believers are finally answered. Sunday Adelaja has done it again, courageously explaining one of life's greatest mysteries.

Derek Schneider
President of History Makers Academy
Founder of History Makers Society

Thank you Apostle Sunday for writing this book, it will go a long way to impact lives and bring meaning to the subject of death and what it means in the life of a believer. I believe leaders and people who stand for progress will benefit from reading this book.

Kindly permit me to say that I'm endorsing this book because it is a timely one, and also it is a tribute to my friend Dr. Myles Munroe who was a man with passion and enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God; a champion of the principles of the Kingdom of God in the Earth who advanced the Kingdom message outside the church walls. A true Diplomat, a General in our era, a Wise Master Builder, a Standard Raiser and a Great Leader.

In 1990, I invited Dr. Monroe to St. Martin to impart the leaders of the Nation, Church, Businesses, Government, etc. He shared a song with the following words "I don't know how long I'll be here. For Jesus said He'll come again; And I know I'm going with Him when He calls my name. Oh Oh Oh, I wanna be ready, Oh, Oh, I wanna be ready". Today the words of this song and the transition of Dr. Munroe is a call for us to be ready.

In this book, Apostle Sunday has made justice to the question of death, tragedy and happenings that we cannot always have a clue about. It's about living a legacy in the earth. Let us arise and do what God is asking us to do without reservation.

Thank you Pastor Sunday for this work and letting the world have vital answers and continue to appreciate Dr. Munoe's Legacy.

Apostle Hilton Albert.
St. Martin French West Indies.

I would like to encourage everyone in the body Christ to read this book! We have all asked the question, "Why do good people die seemingly before their time?" After the death of Dr. Munroe, the church is asking . . . how could the man who gave the church a deeper understanding of purpose, die so tragically?

Pastor Sunday uses great spiritual insight as well as tremendous biblical knowledge to answer these questions. This book is a must read!

Bishop Michael Badger
Bethesda World Harvest International Church

This book that Pastor Sunday has written goes a long way in helping to answer the question why the passing of Dr. Myles & Ruth Munroe and those who also transitioned in that tragic plane accident. It was through Dr. Myles Munroe that God confirmed the message of the Kingdom to me, and its through this book that Pastor Sunday is echoing much of what Dr. Munroe wanted people to understand about death.

This book will help you to come to know and understand that it is not about how you die that is important. The question will be how did you live? What was your contribution to society? What good did you leave? Dr. Myles Munroe travelled the globe preaching and teaching Purpose, and The Kingdom of God, Leadership Principles, and the importance of passing on what God has given to you, so that your legacy; what you've created will outlive you and help others to live successfully. Pastor Sunday has captured both the motivation and heart of Dr. Munroe and his ministry and the heart of the Father towards us in the passing of His great Ambassador.

Thank you Pastor Sunday, for having the sensitivity of heart towards the Holy Spirit in being open to the revelation of the certainty of death, and its impossibility to kill a vision or visionary who has come from God. You've helped us to understand all the more that it is not in how one dies but how they lived that matters most. Thank you Pastor Sunday for being a voice and not an echo of religious men's ideas. This book is much needed in bringing clarity of God's wisdom in this hour.

Dr. Leonard Robinson
Sr. Pastor
Kingdom Vision Ministries Internationa,
Philadelphia, PA

MYLES MUNROE

. . . Finding Answers to Why Good People Die Tragic and Early Deaths

SUNDAY ADELAJA

MYLES MUNROE . . . FINDING ANSWERS TO WHY GOOD PEOPLE DIE TRAGIC AND EARLY DEATHS
By Sunday Adelaja

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DISCLAIMER

The ideas, information and theological teachings contained in this book
*are from the **AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE** on the subject matter. This book is written independent of family and ministries of Late Dr Myles Munroe.*

DEDICATION

To all those people who had one time or the other lost their loved and dear ones, starting from the family and church of my dear friend and brother **Dr Myles Munroe.**

Part of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be going to support Myles Munroe Ministries Worldwide.

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ABOUT PASTOR SUNDAY ADELAJA

FOREWORD

I want to first of all commend Pastor Sunday Adelaja for taking the time to put this work together. Once again, you have blazed the trail, and the rest will be history making and life changing experience for millions.

It is a privilege for me to write the foreword for such a timely, informative, educative and life-changing treasure, as I'll like to refer to this book. In 1984 when I first met Dr. Myles Munroe, I was awakened to the fact that everything in life has a purpose and when the purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable. With his transition, millions of people are asking why this way and why so soon? Finally, the answer to the question is here.

I strongly believe this book will help you find purpose and appreciate what you could ignorantly abuse. Reading the pages of this book, I kept asking myself if I've ever come across a book similar to this, and my answer is an emphatic NO!

This is not a book about tragedy and death as much as it is a book about understanding life and fulfilment. Beyond a tribute, the book seeks to get rid of misconceptions about death and transitioning which unfortunately, many believers dread to think about.

In the eleventh chapter of this book, not only has Pastor Sunday laid out a legacy and insight into a world of Dr. Myles Munroe that many wouldn't have had access to if this book was not written, but he has doubtlessly answered questions that have languished in the minds of people for centuries.

It was Dr. Myles who said, "Life is not measured by its duration, but by its contribution." This is why you have access to this treasure of understanding death from a Kingdom perspective that will align your life and make you kingdom minded as the champion in you emerges.

As we remember Dr. Myles Munroe who has gone ahead and left empty, I wish to remind you in his words that by reading this book you will know "You weren't born just to live a life and to die, you were born to accomplish something specifically," and that "The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life without a purpose."

Finally, I wish to say that those who lead today and those who aspire to leadership tomorrow have a great deal to learn from this book whether they seek to serve Kingdom Community, business or government. The mystery is unveiled. Go for the gold!

Dr. Albert S. L. Kitcher
World Transformation Church (Founder)
KAIROS Group Initiatives (CEO)

PREFACE

On Monday, 10th November 2014, I, like most people, woke up to the shocking news that Dr Myles Munroe and his beloved wife, Ruth, had died alongside seven others in a tragic plane crash the previous night. I was heartbroken, and understandably so. Dr Myles and his wife had impacted my life, ministry and our whole Russian speaking world in a spectacular way.

Dr Myles was not just a pastor, teacher and minister of the gospel – he was, first of all, a man, a full-blooded human being. He was a man who genuinely worked hard to transform himself to reflect the image and likeness of God.

Myles Munroe made you feel you were his peer. He did everything to make you feel at home. I recall the first time I met him in 1999. He and Ruth had decided to attend one of our conferences here at the Embassy of God, Kiev, Ukraine, for the very first time. However, a few days to their arrival, I was taken ill with chickenpox. Of course, with that kind of infection, I needed to be isolated. But when Dr Myles arrived, he insisted on seeing me. When he came into the room, I asked him to stay away from me so he would not get infected. To my surprise, however, he came right at me, hugging me. What he said was even more amazing:

> "...Rub those wounds on my skin. Rub your body against my body because we are brothers; we are covenant brothers, we are brother's keepers. Let your problem become my problem, let your challenge become my challenge, let`s share this chickenpox together, let`s carry the burden together…"

I was stunned. I was stirred. And from that day, Myles Munroe won my heart. He quickly became one of my closest friends, and much more – he was a partner, an elder brother, a confidant.

A day later, when the conference began, I made another discovery about this extraordinary personality. I discovered that Myles Munroe was a teacher, in every sense of the word. At first, I was baffled. I had never heard him speak and I was sure he had never heard me either; yet he spoke as I would have spoken. I had never heard anybody preach the same kind of message that I preached. So, to hear Dr Myles Munroe do it with such brilliance and eloquence totally captivated me. Most preachers would understand me when I say that there comes

a point in your ministry when you find it difficult knowing whom to listen to. But from that week till date, Myles Munroe became one of the few people in the world whom I can readily listen to and learn valuable lessons.

Myles Munroe shook my world. After his messages, testimonies and exhortations in our church, I vowed to discover God for myself in a new way. He had sparked a new hunger in me that drove me to God and self-education like never before. Through this, my ministry took to a totally different dimension. We started to have social, economic and political influence, just as he taught us. Members of our church began to discover and pursue their life purposes, and thus began an explosive and all-round transformation in my ministry!

Let me share another secret with you about the humanity of this great giant of God. Each time I met Dr Myles, he would run towards me, with his arms wide open, as in a warm embrace, then he would fall on his knees, with his head bowed down. This was one of the biggest acts of humility you would ever see, especially coming from such a renowned personality like Dr Myles Munroe.

Dr Myles spent so much to keep coming to Ukraine to help us build a world-class church. He was embarrassed many times by immigration officers at the point of entry; yet, brotherly love prevailed on him to overlook all the challenges that it took to partner with a brother and help a friend.

When the attacks on me and our church from the Ukrainian government became very fierce, with all forms of false allegations, court cases and threats, Dr Myles continued to keep in touch, despite his busy schedule, to assure us of his prayers. Even though I could not travel out of Ukraine at a time, Dr Myles was always sending messages to ascertain my well-being and that of the church.

The last I heard of Myles Munroe was when he sent a message through a mutual friend who was visiting Ukraine from Israel, where Dr Myles had been speaking. He wanted me to know he was coming to see me soon. He said, “Tell Pastor Sunday, he is the most strategic person I have ever met, I will be with him there soon.”

Sadly, that was never to happen. I was no longer to be privileged to receive the embrace of my brother on this side of eternity.

> Beloved Dr Myles, it’s clear to me that you are no longer the one to be with me soon; I am the one to be with you – in our heavenly Father`s home. Rest in peace, my friend. Rest in peace, my brother. Rest in peace, my confidant. Rest in peace, my inspiration. Rest in peace, God`s General. Rest in peace, teacher of men. Rest in peace, man of

purpose.
You have lived a full life, poured out to humanity; great shall be your reward. Rest on, Dr Myles Munroe. Adieu, Dr Ruth Munroe - until we all meet again at the bosom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Pastor Sunday Adelaja
Kiev, Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

I was moved to write this book because, first of all, it is the first anniversary of Dr Myles Munroe's death. I therefore considered it timely to do so. Secondly, following the release of a video with the same title on social media, many friends and followers of our ministry requested for a related publication. There were also some who could not download the video due to the challenge of Internet accessibility. This gives them the opportunity to get the message in textual form.

I also think it is proper to improve on the article that accompanied the video by establishing some of the points scripturally. From the comments I received on my social media pages, I understand that many Christians do not seem to see the Biblical perspective of my submissions. I therefore wish to encourage everyone to get a better understanding of that article by reading this book. Even if you have watched the video, I believe you will find this book more illuminating, as some of the fundamental principles not mentioned in the video are reviewed here.

I am a covenant brother to Dr Myles Munroe; therefore I am compelled to respond to the numerous insinuations that have been made regarding the circumstances of his home-going. As covenant people, we know that the conditions and terms of a covenant require that one party stands for the other if the need arises. I therefore wish to give a comprehensive explanation to what I think God is trying to tell us through the death of Dr Myles and his entourage.

I equally believe that this book will go a long way to support and encourage people everywhere, who have lost or will lose their loved ones either by tragic or controversial circumstances. One of the questions that surface on a daily basis in the minds of Christians worldwide is: how is it possible that brothers and sisters who had served God all their lives can suffer and die in controversial or even tragic circumstances? Since after Dr Munroe's departure, I have heard comments from people. Generally, whether it is sincere Christians or scoffing cynics, the questions remain the same:

How is it possible that Dr Myles could die such a tragic death?
How could a man that had given his life to serve the Lord, die in such a way?
How can it be that Christians who serve God faithfully, who are not living an ungodly lifestyle, can lose their lives in such a tragic way like a plane

crash?

Actually, if these questions only came from cynics and critics, I might not have bothered to respond. However, I must admit that even members of my own church and so many other sincere Christians were having the same confusion. So, this is my way of doing something about it.

I feel obligated to answer a few of the emerging questions because, as already noted, I am a covenant brother to Dr Myles Munroe. According to the conditions of this covenant, I am compelled to respond. The terms of our covenant compel me to answer where a brother can no longer speak for himself.

Chapter 1

SO, WHY SUCH A TRAGIC DEATH?

Let me begin the answer to this vital question by quickly looking at the concept of death itself. The medical dictionary describes death as “the cessation of all vital functions of the body including the heartbeat, brain activity (including the brain stem), and breathing.” The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy simply defines it as “life’s ending.”

However, while there may be some elements of truth in the way scientists and philosophers see death, the simplest and most accurate explanation of death is found in Ecclesiastes 12:7:

> “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it”
> **(Ecclesiastes 12:7)**

So, the essence of death, especially for the believer, is to set the spirit man free from the captivity of the body, so it can return to its Maker. And clearly, as the above scripture implies, it really doesn’t matter the nature of the incident that releases the spirit from that bondage; what matters is that the spirit returns to its Source as soon as it is summoned.

As the same scripture passage also reveals, the body that is left behind after the spirit is gone is merely a “shell” and it actually returns to the dust, from where it emerged. One key revelation in this biblical description of death is that it is the state of the spirit man in a person that determines who they really are and what they do, and not their physical composition. So, when someone mentions “tragic death” in reference to a believer like Dr Munroe, the description is not true in actual sense. What suffers tragedy is the body, which is actually nothing but a perishable casing for the real being.

The creation story clearly reveals to us that as at the time man was created from the dust, he was practically nothing. He only became something when God

breathed (imparted spirit) into him.

> And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
> **(Genesis 2:7)**

What does this show us? That what makes a man alive, active and aspirational is the life of God in him. Consequently, whatever achievements anyone makes on earth, however vibrant, productive, energetic, inspirational, affectionate and indispensable they may seem to us, it is not about their physical prowess but the spirit that lives in them. This means that they don't necessarily belong to the world or even to their families but to the Lord. It is for this reason that the death of a saint is precious in the sight of the Lord – as the spirit swiftly reunites with God who created it in the first place.

Therefore, it doesn't matter so much to God and it doesn't really matter to the person involved "how" death occurs – so long as the spirit is still in tune with God. Who cares about how the shell of an egg is cracked as long as the omelette tastes good? God is not interested in the body as in the soul. That is why Jesus said we should not bother about damage or destruction inflicted on our bodies by persecutors, but to be careful about the state of our souls.

> "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"
> **(Matthew 10:28)**

It is also for the same reason that Paul the Apostle said, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). He said they were not bothered if their bodies perished as long as their inward man remained perpetually renewed and rested in God. Compare this assurance from Paul to the declaration of Stephen, the first martyr. Even as his body was being battered and his bones being broken with stones, only one thing mattered to him – his spirit. "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59).

J.R Miller, in his writing, *Stephen the First Martyr* said, "to Stephen, dying was only breathing out his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ! He knew it was not death—but life, which was before him. His body was being mangled and

broken—but his spirit, his real self, could not be harmed. Beyond the strange mystery of death—Jesus waits to receive the departing spirit. Death is only a gateway through which the soul passes—and then life and glory burst upon the vision of the emancipated spirit!"

Indeed, as Christians, it is rather unfitting to be overly concerned about the physical condition in which a person dies. God knows better. Our concern should rather be the state of the soul. A soul that is damaged by sin or unproductive living is in a more tragic and worrisome state.

We must also understand that the main source of conflict and confusion on such matters is often our religious backgrounds and dogmas. God's perspective on death is different from ours.

Preciousness of Saints' Death

Let me focus a little on this wonderful verse of Scripture that says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"(Psalm 116:15).

This really should stir our curiosity and indeed make us rethink our perception of death. If death were to be as horrible as we tend to think, why should God consider the death of His saints precious? Why should He be glad about it? Is He being sadistic? Not at all! The reality is that our perception of death is often wrong. God sees the death of His saints – His beloved children, who mean so much Him - as a PROMOTION for them!

Why would God think this way? It's because death, to the saint of God, is the portal to endless bliss! It is a release from temptations, afflictions, infirmities, conflicts and sorrows.

I want you to note that the verse doesn't say that what makes the death of a saint precious is the way they died or how long they lived, but the fact that they are "saints" and they are coming home. This means that, to God, the death of a saint is ever precious, whether or not the saint is young, middle-aged or aged. In God's eyes, it is still something very precious.

What If the Death Was Violent?

Another significant perspective on the tragic death of Christians and God's servants is revealed to us in Isaiah 57:1:

> "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." **Isaiah 57:1 (KJV)**

Now, look at this: **"The righteous perisheth…"** This might have sounded strange and outrageous to many, if it had not come from God's own word, the Bible. Yes, the righteous can perish, but not in punitive or everlasting terms. To "perish", according to the dictionary, is "to suffer death, typically in a violent, sudden or untimely way." In other words, to perish is to die tragically and untimely. Does this bear any semblance to the death of Dr Munroe and his team in that ghastly crash? Exactly so!

It is obvious then that God makes provision for tragic death, even for the righteous, in the scriptures. The importance that God attaches to scripture references like this is to diffuse confusion about such death and to bring understanding to His people. British clergyman and writer, John Angell James, in his writing, *The Death of Eminent Ministers, a Public Loss* said that, "neither great talents, nor eminent virtues, nor extensive usefulness, can secure for their possessor a longer exemption from the stroke of death—than falls to the lot of humanity in general…There is, indeed, no border country, no neutral territory, no sacred enclosure, within which the holy and benevolent may retire to carry on their labours, and protract their usefulness, secure from the pursuit of disease and death."

The same verse of Scripture says, **"…and no man layeth it to heart…"** This statement denotes confusion and lack of understanding from people. God knows people may not understand why things like this should happen and they will question and query Him on the matter; especially the religious-minded, who will not understand such a tragic death in comparison to the case of Abraham, who lived for so long and died peacefully.

But, then, why would God allow His servant to die in any other way than Abraham or Jacob? Could a good God be so inconsistent and unjust to "repay" faithful servants with tragic death? This actually is part of what makes our God a God of unsearchable wisdom, a God of mystery and a God of incomprehensible depth. God cannot be put in a box. God cannot be predicted, and He cannot be fully understood.

> "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" **(Romans 11:33).**

Supremacy of God

Again, dear friend, please note that the word perish in Isaiah 57:1 does not refer to worldly people; it refers to the righteous. The God of love, the God of compassion, the God of depth and the God of wisdom gives room for the righteous to perish for reasons only best known to Him. Beyond that, God also would allow good and "…merciful men…" (These are men that are much better than average men) to be taken at a time or in a way that most people would not expect.

Are you confused?

Well, these are the things that make God G-O-D! He is sovereign. He is supreme. And He is surpassing in wisdom, knowledge and understanding!

The majority of the challenges that we encounter in life often stem from wanting to know what God has kept away from us for our good (Deuteronomy29:29). The human nature in us always wants to be in charge, and that includes reading the mind of God Himself. We see this reflected in Saul, the first king of Israel, when he consulted the witch at Endor to seek a medium on the outcome of the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. And we know he heard what he was not supposed to hear (1 Samuel 28).

Our insatiable curiosity to always know what God has kept away from us, especially as it relates to the loss of loved ones, exposes our lack of trust in God's judgement. But, in reality, this should not be the way to respond to the departure of these saints of God, particularly when we know they walked with God faithfully and carried out their services sincerely. Our very attitude should be to trust God, even when we don't understand why tragedy happens. He understands what we don't.

Now, this is very important from the verse: **"…none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come."**

> **There are several things God sees that no man sees. At any given point in any tragic story and in all unfathomable misfortunes, there is something that God is seeing which you are not seeing. When we only consider our own point of view, we are not always aware of the blind spots in our understanding.**

This lack of understanding often leads to confusion, disillusionment and disappointment.

The passage above tells us that we should consider that maybe these men are actually taken away from some form of evil that is to come. This evil could be global or personal. If you could only see behind the scenes as God sees, you might end up rejoicing about what you had earlier called tragic.

Is Ceremonial Blessing Compulsory?

One person who was apparently bewildered by the manner of Dr Myles' death made reference to Jacob (in Genesis 49:1) and said, "Jacob, when he was about to die, gathered members of his family, prophesied over them and prayed for them before passing. How could such a great man of God like Myles Munroe, die in such a tragic and sudden way-so different from someone like Jacob?"

Again, I would like to point out that the way you die really doesn't matter in the context of eternity. When someone leaves this physical world, it is really we who are left that are more concerned about how the death occurred.

As regards having a chance to bless your family before passing, Dr Myles did that for over thirty years! He had been prophesying and praying for both his biological and spiritual children and did not need any ceremonial family blessing before he departed.

That was just Dr Myles' lifestyle. He probably blessed as many of his children (spiritual and biological) as he could on that same Sunday, before the tragic incident. He lived that way on a regular basis.

Chapter 2

THE FREEDOM OF DEATH

There is no denying that tragic deaths, especially those resulting from fatal accidents, sometimes involve mangled bodies. However, it is important to note that as soon as a person's spirit leaves their body, they are just as whole as when they were in the flesh, except that they are much younger, more attractive, and perfect. They are now in a "glorified" body.

No matter how good-looking someone is here on earth, no matter how whole they think they are in their physical body, it would hardly compare with their glorified body. Once they cross over to eternity, their earthly body would be as ugly as that of someone who had suffered some kind of tragic death.

As a pastor for over twenty years, I have listened to stories of individuals who had had extraordinary experiences about death and the afterlife. I remember one particular story of a woman who died in her hospital bed. She was a young woman who was quite beautiful and fashionable in her earthly body. However, when her spirit suddenly left her body, she found herself standing on the rooftop, looking down at the doctors and family members surrounding her body.

Puzzled by what she saw, she asked herself, *"What has happened?"* She then began reaching down, trying unsuccessfully to touch her family members. Then she took a closer look at the body on the bed and asked in horror, *"Who is that...?"* When it dawned on her that it was her old body she was seeing, she couldn't believe it. It looked so repulsive!

Scottish theologian and philosopher, Thomas Boston, once said, "Death makes the greatest beauty so loathsome, that it must be buried out of sight!" Puritan preacher and theologian, Thomas Watson also said, "One scarcely knows their friends, they are so disfigured by death! The eyes are hollow, the jaws are fallen; death carries away all the goodly spoil of beauty. It changes a living body, into a foul carcass…Take a body of the finest spinning, once death like a moth gets into it, it consumes all the lustre and glory of it. Death puts the body into such a frightful state — that nothing can desire it but worms!"

The reality is that while we are in the flesh we sometimes think that we are exceedingly beautiful because of our physical features. However, if we were to compare our earthly, "corruptible" bodies to the beauty of all things heavenly, they could hardly compare!

The point I am trying to make here is that no matter how good-looking you are in your earthly body, or how complete you are in the flesh, when your spirit leaves your body, it would feel like letting a bird fly away after being caged for many years.

This is the reason we are repeatedly admonished by the Scriptures to watch over our souls which will endure for all eternity, rather than paying undue attention to our physical bodies. Regardless of the damage and decay our earthly bodies suffer in the course of fulfilling our callings on earth and safeguarding our souls towards eternity, we will be clothed anew with glorious, heavenly bodies in due time.

Author and poet, Horatius Bonar, in comparing our physical bodies with our glorified bodies in death, wrote in the piece, *Coming of the Perfect, Departure of the Imperfect:* "Our flesh, from the cradle to the tomb, is feeble, broken, ready to faint--the cause and the inlet of a thousand sorrows! It is truly a frail body, in which we groan, being burdened; a vile body, needing such perpetual care, and food, and medicine, and rest--yet, after all, incapable of being preserved--which, in spite of all our pamperings, is hastening on to the sick-bed, and the separation from its guest, the soul. But look beyond the tomb and see the glory! This head shall ache no more! These hands and feet shall be weary no more! This flesh shall throb with anguish no more! God Himself shall wipe away all tears from these eyes--and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying!"

This calls us to wisdom as Christians. We must be wise in getting our priorities right. It is our souls that matter, not our bodies! Ebenezer Erskine, a Scottish minister also said, "Remember, that whatever care you take about this clay tabernacle, it will drop down to dust before long, and the abhorrent grave will be its habitation, where worms and corruption will prey upon the fairest face and purest complexion. Where will be your beauty, strength, and fine attire, when the curtains of the grave are drawn about you?"

The Elders' Perspective

The great saints of old apparently had a better grasp of this truth, which made

them have a better perspective of death than most of us in this generation. Paul the Apostle, for instance, once said,

> "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" **(Romans 8:22-23).**

To the Corinthians, he was even more, explicit:

> "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven…We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"
> **(2 Corinthians 5:1-8).**

This obviously was the case with Dr Myles Munroe. His somewhat violent death could be seen as a reflection of the intense desire of his spirit to be liberated from the limiting confinement of his body. Moreover, God never promised anyone that they would die peacefully, in ideal conditions, surrounded by family members.

Even more significant is the fact that Dr Munroe, like most discerning Christians, was fully aware of the possibility of sudden and tragic death, even for believers; hence he advocated the need for thoughtful living. For instance, during one of his final messages shortly before his death, he had challenged the audience in the television studio where the recording was done to think about what would happen to their legacy if they suddenly died in an accident after leaving the studio:

> "... If you die today as a leader, leaving the studio in an accident, what happens to your organisation? What happens to your church? What happens to your business? If it dies when you die, you are a failure!"

I definitely don't agree with the assumption that the death of Dr Munroe was as a result of him having done something wrong or that he was in sin or false doctrine.

Having known Dr Munroe personally, I am certain that he lived a full life and accomplished a great work. And even now that he has gone to receive his eternal reward, his departure and legacies continue to stir up others to unleash their potentials for the glory of God.

The "Underage" Question

Now, there are also people who have been saying, "If you claim that Dr Myles lived a full life, what do you say about his youth pastor who also died in the crash? What do you say about the youth pastor's son who was only five years old? What about the other people on board that plane? Did they live a full life too?"

I will fully handle this query under the chapter, "STILL WHY DIE SO YOUNG?" However, let me say a few things on it now. Why would God allow the lives of some people to be taken so early? I, of course, cannot say that I have full understanding of the mind of God on the subject, but I hope that some of my explanations will bring peace and solace to people who are sincerely seeking to understand why God would allow something like this to happen to Christians.

One perspective is that death is going to come to us all anyways. Every individual eventually needs to go home, and to be set free from his or her earthly body, one way or the other. Think of it like being in a prison all of your life and finally being set free from that prison of a body! It really doesn't matter whether God uses this way or that to open the heavenly door for you. For the person who is dead, they're simply glad to be out of that prison!

Indeed, it is needless sympathising with the dead in Christ as if something tragic had happened to them. The truth is that where they are in heaven, they know that we that are still here are the ones who deserve pity for our many battles and vicissitudes. We should not sorrow about them, but instead think about our lives – how we should live so we can be reunited with them in heaven eventually.

Of believers who are gone to heaven ahead of us, First Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, J.C. Ryle in his writing, *Christ's Greatest Trophy!* said, "We should not weep for them, but for ourselves! We are still warring, but they are at peace! We are labouring, but they are at rest! We are watching, but they are sleeping! We are wearing our spiritual armour, but they have forever put it off! We are at sea, but they are safe in harbour! We have tears, but they have joy! We are strangers and pilgrims, but they are at home! Surely, better are the "dead in

Christ", than the living! Surely the very hour the poor saint dies - he is at once higher and happier than the happiest upon earth!"

There is no sorrow in death, which is the passageway to believer's home. Heaven is our home. Heaven is our liberty. Heaven is our victory. It doesn't matter how we leave this earth, we are going HOME – and that's what matters!

Death's Defeat

The scriptures further promise us that death and the grave would not have the victory over our lives. They do not have the last word; God does!

> "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"
> **(1 Corinthians 15:54-55)**

I have heard from people saying that God must have killed Dr Munroe or that Satan must have killed him. The truth is that death did not take Dr Myles Munroe – God did. From the above scripture, the Bible affirms to us that death will not have the victory. The final victory belongs to God and the believers, not to death or the grave.

According to Hebrews 2:14, Christ, in His death, swallowed up death. Therefore, I do not submit to the notion that the believer's death is in any way a victory for the enemy. No! Rather, just like Christ in his death, we too in our death and by our death defeat death. I think our death at any age is a victory for the Kingdom of God and a new beginning for the work of God on earth. Let God decide when it is time for each of us to go home to his or her reward. Whenever that time may be, this much is certain: death for us, believers, is victory. It is liberation. It is triumph. It is home-going. It is the way we go to our reward. It is the way for us to receive our trophies!

Even more cheering is the revelation by Jesus Christ concerning Himself in Revelation 1:18: "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

Christ says He has the keys of death, which means that the door of death can never be opened to any of His children except He allows it. And should He allow a thing like that to happen, it would be that all would certainly be for the good of the believer. Of this truth, Charles Spurgeon clearly wrote:

> "No man can die unless Jesus opens the mystic door of death. It is our consolation that our death is entirely in his hands. In the midst of fever and pestilence, we shall never die until he wills it. In the times of the greatest healthiness, when all the air is balmy, we shall not live a second longer than Jesus has purposed; the place, the circumstance, the exact second of our departure, have all been appointed by him, and settled long ago in love and wisdom. A thousand angels could not hurl us to the grave, nor could a host of cherubim confine us there one moment after Jesus says, "Arise."
>
> This is our comfort. We are "immortal until our work is done;" mortal still, but immortal also. Let us never fear death, then, but rather rejoice at the approach of it, since it comes at our dear Bridegroom's bidding! Christ has the key of death, and therefore death to us is no longer a gate of terror."

Beautiful "Tragedy"

Indeed, it is more tragic if a 90-year-old person dies quietly in his or her sleep, without being saved; or even if he was saved but living for the things of the world. On the other hand, when a teenager dies in an automobile crash, it is not a tragedy if that teenager was saved and faithfully serving God.

> "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."
> **(Romans 8:28)**

Therefore we should "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." (John 7:24).

History itself has taught us that it does not matter how you leave this world, as long as you live every day of your life in preparation for heaven. This truth was not lost on Susannah Spurgeon, wife of the eloquent clergyman, Charles Spurgeon. Following the death of her husband in 1892, she wrote in her collection of writings, "In Memoriam: A Song of Sighs."

Indeed, it is more tragic if a 90-year-old person dies quietly in his or her sleep, without being saved; or even if he was saved but living for the things of the world. On the other hand, when a teenager dies in an automobile crash, it is not a tragedy if that teenager was saved and

faithfully serving God.

Ever since the solemn midnight hour when God took to Himself my most precious treasure, “the desire of my eyes,” my loving and dearly-beloved husband—the above inspired words (“With Christ—which is far better!” Philippians 1:23.) have been a wellspring of solace and comfort to my desolate heart. In the first anguish of my grief, I wrote them on the “farewell” card, and the palm-branches, which waved over his dead body in token of everlasting victory, bore their grand message of consolation to the thousands of weeping mourners.

Now, as the days go by, and the sense of loss deepens, and is still more acutely realized, the blessed fact set forth by these words comes again with Divine power of healing to my sorrowing soul. It is because it is far better for him to be with Christ—that I can patiently and even cheerfully endure my lonely life. I can sometimes dwell with such joy on the thought of his eternal glory “with Christ,” that I forget to sorrow over my own great and unspeakable loss.

A dear friend wrote thus to me, the other day—”Oh, when I think of him, as able to praise his Savior, and preach without fatigue or pain—no longer limping, or leaning on his staff—with no cough, no faintness—no swollen fingers or ankles—away from the fogs and mists; where no heresies distress his heart; when I think of him thus, my heart fairly leaps for joy!”

Here again is another beautiful paradox from the Scripture:

> “A good name is better than precious ointment; and THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF ONE’S BIRTH.”
> **(Ecclesiastes 7:1)**

I believe the above scripture is self-explanatory enough. From the other side, and from heaven’s perspective, the day of death is seen as being more glorious than the day of one’s birth, just like a good name is better than precious ointment. However from this side of heaven, we tend to be sad about the day of death, and glad about the day of birth. Ecclesiastes 7:1 says it is actually supposed be the other way round.

Indeed, what really calls for rejoicing is when you depart this sinful world, not minding what age you are delivered from the evils therein. This is because you are going to your reward, and you are claiming victory over death and being welcomed to your eternal home. Your last day on earth should your best day because death is a rest from the trouble of your labours, afflictions, persecutions,

temptation and sorrow.

Tell me, reader, is there anything bad about all this? We must learn to see from God's perspective, and to see how God sees. We must be less sensual and strive to become more spiritual. At the end of the day, God decides when we come into this world and He decides when we leave it!

Before I close this chapter, let me challenge you with the letter a minister of God once wrote to one of his church members grieving over the loss of her godly daughter. Just as many are questioning God over the passage of his servant, Dr Munroe, the woman too had been overwhelmed with grief. Here is what the minister, John Berridge, wrote to her:

> "I received your letter, about the death of your godly daughter—and hope that you will soon learn to bless your Redeemer for snatching her away so speedily. Methinks I see great mercy in the suddenness of her removal; and when your affections have done yearning for her—you will see it too."
>
> O! what is she snatched from? Why, truly, from the plague of an evil heart, a wicked world, and a crafty devil—snatched from all future bitter grief, and from everything which might wound her ear, afflict her eye, or pain her heart!
>
> And what is she snatched to? To a land of everlasting peace, where every inhabitant can say, 'I am no more sick!' No more affliction in the body, no more plague in the heart—but all full of love and full of praise; ever seeing with enraptured eyes, ever blessing with adoring hearts—that dear Lamb who has washed them in His blood, and has now made them kings and priests unto God, forever and ever!
>
> Oh, madam! What would you rather have? Is it not better singing in heaven, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!' —than crying out on earth, 'O wretched woman that I am!'
>
> Is it not better to have your daughter taken to heaven—than to have your heart divided between Christ and her? If she was a silver idol before—might she not prove to be a golden idol afterwards?
>
> She has gone to the most blessed place, and will see you again by and by—never more to part. Had she crossed the sea and gone to Ireland—you would have born it; but now that she is gone to heaven—should this be difficult for you? Strange love is this!
>
> Such behavior in others would not surprise me—but I could almost

> chasten you for it. And I am sure your daughter would chasten you too, if she was called back but one moment from the glories of heaven—to gratify your fond desires! I cannot soothe you—and I must not flatter you. I am glad the dear creature has gone to heaven before you. Lament, if you please; but Glory, glory, glory be to God!"

With this understanding, rather than mourn, I'd rather say concerning Dr Myles Munroe:

Dr Myles, I am proud of you! On behalf of Christians everywhere, we are proud of you! What you have accomplished for the Kingdom of God in this life is what matters. It does not matter how you left this world, but rather, what extraordinary footprint you left in it.

That is the question we should be labouring over - what footprint will we leave in this world? Dr Myles left a wonderful, larger than life footprint and it is going to live forever through his books, messages and concepts. As he often said, "The richest place in the world is the grave yard, or cemetery" and "the greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life without purpose."

These timeless aphorisms spoken by Dr Munroe now testify and speak louder than anything else! Let's now proceed to fully explore the delightful truths about the early deaths of Christians.

Dr Myles, I am proud of you! On behalf of Christians everywhere, we are proud of you! What you have accomplished for the Kingdom of God in this life is what matters. It does not matter how you left this world, but rather, what extraordinary footprint you left in it.

Chapter 3

STILL, WHY DIE SO YOUNG?

In case you still consider tragic and premature death to be inconsistent with the Christian faith, then ponder on this: Why did many of the early believers die so young? Why did many of them die so tragically, instead of dying quietly and in good old age? Could it be that they were not righteous, prayerful or discerning enough? Or could it be that their deaths caught God unawares?

First, let's consider some examples.

John The Baptist

John the Baptist, who did so much as the forerunner and publicist of Jesus Christ, died brutally and prematurely. Of His life, Jesus openly testified, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist..." (Matthew 11:11). When he was imprisoned by Herod, Jesus was fully aware. Being all-knowing, Jesus was also clearly aware that he was going to be killed. Yet Jesus did nothing to rescue him, until he was eventually beheaded. Was Christ's seeming inaction out of wickedness? Certainly not. (Further explanation will be provided on this in the second part of this chapter).

Stephen was described in the Scripture as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5). He was a young, vibrant apostle of Christ. Yet, he died in a most gruesome manner. Interestingly, shortly before his horrific death by stoning, he testified to seeing Christ standing at the right hand of God. This shows, beyond any shadow of doubt, that Christ was fully aware of his imminent death. Still, he wasn't prevented from dying. You wonder why?

James

James was one of the disciples with very close attachment to Jesus. He was one of the three men in the "inner circle" of Jesus, the others being Peter and John. Yet, his violent death at the hand of Herod Agrippa who had him beheaded

was not averted by divine fiat (Acts 12:1-2). Interestingly, the same Herod who successfully killed James, could not succeed in killing Peter as Peter was miraculously rescued from prison by an angel of God. This shows that God's dealings with His saints are purely based on His prerogatives.

Paul

Paul was one of the most prominent of the early Christians. He was used of God to write more than half of the entire New Testament, consisting of 27 books. He was taken to the third heaven where saw and heard what no other mortal man had perceived (2 Corinthians 12:2). Still, he died a violent death by beheading.

All the other apostles of Jesus (with the exception of one – John the Beloved, who merely survived brutal attacks by divine pre-arrangement) equally died tragic and untimely deaths. Historical records have accounts of them being skinned alive, dragged by horses through the street, crucified, clubbed or stoned to death.

Contemporary Cases

Away from the disciples, many Christians in recent centuries, too, have had their fair share of tragedies. Some were fed to the lions, some were burnt at the stake, while others were cast into drums of hot oil and roasted alive. Indeed, all through the ages, down to the 20th century and even the current century, Christians have been killed by various individuals, groups, and by Islamic, communist or atheistic States.

On June 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a fervent preacher and staunch opponent of the Nazi Germany's attacks against Jews, was executed by hanging by Hitler's government. He was just 39. In his biography of Bonhoeffer's life, Eberhard Bethge, a student and friend of Bonhoeffer's, wrote down the narration of a man who saw the execution:

> "I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer...kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the few steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Obviously, Bonhoeffer was a devoted Christian but that did not prevent him from a ghastly death.

On January 8, 1956, 29-year-old Jim Elliot and his four of missionary colleagues were killed while trying to establish contact with the Auca Indians in Ecuador (now known as the Waodani people). Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Flemming and Roger Youderian had been working to make friendly contact with the Auca tribe which they had seen from the air. They would fly around the area, shouting friendship words in the Auca language through a loud speaker and dropping down gifts in a basket. After three to four months of gift dropping, they decided to make a base and set up shelter at nearby river. Not long after, they all were killed by the same people they were trying to help. Their bodies were found brutally pierced with spears and hacked by machetes.

As I write now, Islamic fundamentalist groups, under various names, are unleashing terror on Christian individuals, groups and churches all over the world. Many have been brutally killed and many more are awaiting their deaths in various dens and dungeons. Does it mean God is not concerned?

Still, apart from cases of Christians being killed by the ungodly, there are also cases of Christians dying prematurely of diseases and disasters. I read recently in the Charisma magazine about a young minister of God called Benny Benson who died tragically of cancer. Author of the article, J. Lee Grady, who also happened to be a friend of the deceased minister narrated what happened:

> "Doctors confirmed only 10 months ago that my friend Benny Benson had a malignant tumour in his spine. He underwent treatment, but in the end more tumours appeared. Nothing could stop the spread of the disease—not radiation, chemotherapy or surgery. He died on Jan. 31, and I spoke at his memorial service in New Hampshire on Feb. 12.
>
> I still can't believe Benny is gone. More than 500 people attended his funeral. Many of them were college students who had been discipled through Benny's campus outreach, which he carried out with his wife, Cindy. Like so many of Benny's other friends and family members, these students had prayed for Benny to be miraculously healed of the cancer.
>
> But in the end, Benny got the ultimate healing—by stepping into eternity."

So, why does God allow all this, despite His promises of long life for His children?

Understanding Biblical Promises of Long Life

I have observed over the years that one of the reasons many Christians find it difficult to grapple with tragic and untimely deaths of other Christians is the seeming discrepancy of such occurrences with the scriptural promises of long life.

Let's see a few of these promises.

> "No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days."
> **(Exodus 23:26)**
> "With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation."
> **(Psalm 91:16)**
> "The Lord bless you out of Zion, And may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!"
> **(Psalm 128:5-6)**
> "My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you."
> **(Proverbs 3:1-2)**
> "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."
> **(Ephesians 6:2-3)**

These promises of God are indeed true and dependable. But we have to fully understand and put these promises in context, so we don't get confused.

First, we must ask ourselves, "What is long life?" Or better still, how does God see long life? This needs to be established because I believe that God's ways are indeed different from our ways and His thoughts ours. To a human being, long life may imply living up to 80, 90, or 100 years and above. But is this really God's viewpoint? If so, why did Christ tell His apostles that they would be hated and killed for His name sake? Could God be lying about the promise of long life when Jesus never intervened in the impending death of John the Baptist? Or could there be inconsistency with God when He allowed Stephen, James and several of His apostles to die young? And is that why He still allows many of His followers down the ages to die prematurely?

Or could it be that we are the ones misunderstanding God's meaning?

Let the Bible answer for us.

1. In the heavenly realm, days and years are not seen the way we see them on earth.

> "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night."
> **(Psalm 90:4)**

> "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."
> **(2 Peter 3:8)**

This should be glaring enough for us to consider and understand. God is not being cruel or untruthful about His promise of long life when He decides to take a believer home suddenly. We may think the individual has not lived long enough based on our calculations of time, days and years; but in God's own calculation, it's another thing entirely.

And why should God's calculation not be different from ours? Do humans really have a specific definition of long life? Several billions of people live on the face of the earth and if you ask each of them on how long is long enough to live on earth, the answers will vary significantly! In fact, most people would love to live on and on. You hardly even find someone who thinks he has lived long enough, except if sickness or disease has turned him to a complete invalid. So, why shouldn't God fix and keep to His own schedule in the midst of our fickleness?

2. Long life is life that is long enough to fulfil our assigned number of days.

In the first passage quoted above on the promise of long life, God categorically says,

> "No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I WILL FULFILL THE NUMBER OF YOUR DAYS."
> **(Exodus 23:26).**

God's definition of long life is plain enough to see in this verse. He says He will fulfil the number of our days. Let's look at two things here. One, this

promise is meant for each individual, not the general mass; otherwise it will imply that we all have the same number of days to live, which is not possible. So we understand that each of us has a specific number of days to live on earth. This is what God promises to fulfil, not our whimsical wishes and expectations.

Secondly, if we agree that this "number of your days" is an individual thing, then WHO fixes this number of days for each individual? Obviously it's God! How many days has He assigned to each of us? Nobody knows. He alone can know and decide which number of years is long enough for each individual, based on what He has assigned before we were born!

Prolific author of religious essays, John MacDuff, says something about this in his writing, *A Book for the Bereaved:*

> "Just as the mother knows the best hour to lay her little one in its couch or cradle—undresses it, composes it to rest, sings its lullaby—and the cherub face, lately all smiles, is now locked in quiet repose; so Christ comes to all His children, of whatever age, at His own selected season, and says, "Your hour of rest has arrived. I am to take off the garments of mortality. Come! I will robe you in the vestments of the tomb." He smoothens the narrow bed, composes the pillow, and sings His own lullaby of love, "Fear not, my child, for I am with you; sleep on now and take your rest!"
>
> Be comforted with this blessed truth, that the hour of death cannot come a moment sooner than Jesus appoints. He knows the best time to bid you and yours the long "good-night." Interesting it is (and a Bible truth too) to think of troops of angels hovering over the death-pillow, and watching with guardian care the sleeping dust of the "Early Grave." But more comforting still, surely, is it to think of the Lord of angels closing the eyes and hushing to slumber—Christ Himself leading to the tomb—the robing-room of immortality—"unclothing," that His people may be "clothed upon," and that "mortality may be swallowed up of life."

3. Long life is life that is long enough to fulfil our purpose on earth.

This is really significant, and this is where I will fulfil the promise I made earlier to explain further about the life of John the Baptist in particular.

God never created a thing without a purpose. This applies even more to human beings, who are created with unique features, talents and traits. To us as humans, all we see in a person are the physical attributes, but God looks far

beyond into the specific assignment the individual is created to fulfil on earth. I don't believe anyone is created to simply come and eat, drink, procreate, raise children, enjoy family life and then die. No. So, if there is a unique purpose, an assignment to fulfil, we must ask ourselves, once again, who decides this purpose? Of course, it's God! Who decides when this purpose is satisfactorily fulfilled? God! Who decides when to recall the individual from his duty-post to give account of His stewardship? It's God!

The challenge with most of us, humans, is that we want God to conform to our own ideas, programmes and perspectives, rather than deciding to ascertain and conform to His. This is why we rush to question God when things don't go the way we think they should go or when people don't live as long as we wish them to.

> "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?
> **(Romans 9:20-21).**

Now we can apply this explanation to people of God who died prematurely like John the Baptist. What was the mission of John the Baptist on earth? Why did he not live like every other person? Why did he confine himself to the wilderness, eating just locust and wild honey (Matthew 3:4)?

Let's allow him speak for himself. When the Jews sent some priests and Levites to ask for his identity, here's what he said, "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord,"' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:23)

John's primary purpose on earth, as predicted since the time of Prophet Isaiah, was to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ; he was to prepare the heart of the people for Christ's imminent ministry. Now, did John fulfil that purpose? Obviously yes! Was his life long enough to fulfil it? Yes! Can we say his death was untimely? No.

There are those who think that John might have lived longer if he had not rebuked Herod for taking his brother's wife. This is an error. When one's assignment on earth is over, one will have to go, one way or the other.

Still, on fulfilment of purpose, we must be equally reminded that God does not look at length of life the way we do, nor does He need to inform

or consult us when someone's mission is over. What this means is that a person's mission on earth could be fulfilled in one day (as in the case of an infant) or in a hundred years.

Let me quickly cite two examples.

When David and Bathsheba committed adultery, the whole affair could have been concealed; but God decided to introduce a twist to it – a child was conceived. Why was the child conceived? To expose what was meant to be concealed; to bring the adulterers to penitence and repentance. When David still went ahead to try and cover up his sin by killing Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, God ensured that the child fulfil its mission.

Note that the child could have died in the womb as a punishment for what David and Bathsheba did; but God allowed the child to be born so David would have developed a strong emotional bond – which would be painfully severed. Nathan, in pronouncing judgement on David said the child would die. Thus, the child was struck with an infirmity. David who had become fond of him could not bear it. He was in such agony that he could not eat for days until the child died (See 2 Samuel 11 and 12 for the story).

Now, to an outsider who never knew what transpired and led to the death of the child, it would seem God was wicked – as some often say today – for allowing the child to suffer and die. It would seem as if the child died too soon. But they err. That child, though still an infant, fully fulfilled his purpose on earth.

The second example I will cite is not about a human being directly, but I believe it will equally help us to better understand the first example, as well as one of God's ways of dealing with us as humans.

When Jonah felt displeased that God had shown mercy to Nineveh following their repentance, God did something extraordinary. He made a tree to grow suddenly so Jonah could hide under its shade. Jonah had thought the tree was going to last for long, but in the original programme of God, it was to fulfil its purpose within a short time. Thus, as Jonah began to feel comfortable, God caused the tree to die. Thereafter, as Jonah complained bitterly about the death of the tree forgetting that it was not his making in the first place, God proceeded to let him know that it was all done for a purpose.

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