When God Is Silent



WHY PAIN AND SUFFERING?

SOMEONE WHO SUFFERS WITH US

THE PLAN TO END EVIL FOREVER

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A God Who Allows Suffering?



01

"Men to the left! Women to the right!" the officer yelled.

Fifteen-year-old Elie Wiesel clutched his father's hand as he watched his mother and sisters going in the other direction. Little did he know it would be the last time he saw them. This was Birkenau, a Polish concentration camp. He and his family were Jews with little hope of survival.

Elie clung to his father, fearful that he would lose him. They had to stay together.

A man came up and mocked the group:

"Do you see that chimney over there? See it? Do you see those flames? Over there—that's where you're going to be taken. That's your grave over there. Haven't you realized it yet?"

Indeed, reality was now settling in. They had all been lied to—this plan was not for their good and never had been.

Soldiers marched the captives into the camp. They passed ditches filled with fire. Something was being burned.

Elie couldn't believe his eyes. Was it really possible? He wondered if it was a nightmare. They were burning children—babies.

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead. He tried to reassure himself out loud that they would not burn people of his age or his father's age. "Humanity would never tolerate it," he said.

"Humanity? Humanity is not concerned with us. Today anything is allowed. Anything is possible, even these crematories . . . " Elie's father's voice trailed off, heavy with sobs.

Others around them were weeping too. Some were reciting the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. He heard his father say the words, "May His name be blessed and magnified."

But Elie couldn't take it. *Why should I bless His name?* he thought. *The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, is silent. What do I have to thank Him for?*

Looking back on this experience, he wrote these words:

"Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night. . . . Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

"Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever."[1]

Where Was God?

Where was God in those dark moments of injustice? Elie Wiesel is not the only one who has wondered this. His struggle echoes the cries of many hearts.

We have all experienced injustices:

- The wars that have taken the lives of people we loved.
- The prejudice that seems to have hindered our success in life.
- The shame of abuse.
- The abandonment of a loved one.
- The person who slandered unjustly.

In these struggles, we wonder where God is. Could He really stand by and just watch? If He is an all-powerful God as the Tanakh describes Him, then why doesn't He do something to end the injustice in our world? To us, His silence is cruel.

We begin to wonder: *Does He even care?* It seems that He is absent. He has stepped away and

> *"Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever."*

expects us to endure the sufferings of this life by ourselves.

The two options seem to be: God is loving but not powerful, or He is powerful but not loving.

But perhaps there is a third possibility—that a loving and all-powerful God does exist. Is there something else going on in the background that we can't see? Something that would provide a reasonable explanation for the existence of evil and suffering?

The Tanakh sheds surprising light on this predicament. It shows us that God is not silent when there's injustice. In fact, He has chosen the very best option to bring about the *end* of suffering and evil.

Reference

1. Elie Wiesel, ***Night*** (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), pp. 27–32.



The Origin of Suffering



02

Human nature recoils at suffering. Even though we often encounter it, something in us despises it. We refuse to accept that it's a normal part of life.

This reflexive reaction to suffering is not new.

Since the beginning of time, people have wrestled with the idea of suffering. The Tanakh offers us many examples of people who asked why—why God permits suffering, why God stands by and fails to intervene, why our cries of agony seem to fall unanswered to the ground. The prophets, for example, were foremost in asking these questions.

When the prophets saw injustice, they asked God, "How long?" The same question is repeated many times:

David asked, "How long, *Adonai*? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm/Tehillim 13:2).

"How long will the wicked, *Adonai*, how long will the wicked gloat?" (Psalm 94:3).

Jeremiah wept, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? . . . How long will the land mourn and the grass of all the field wither? Because those living in it are evil, beasts and birds are swept away" (Jeremiah/Yirmeyahu 12:1, 4).

Habakkuk asked, "How long, *Adonai*, have I cried for help, yet You do not hear? I cry out to You—'Violence!' yet You do not deliver" (Habakkuk 1:2).

The Suffering of Job

One of the greatest examples of unjust suffering recorded in the Tanakh is the story of Job. Here are some of the terrible events that occurred during a very short period in his life:

- Enemy raiders came and captured his livestock, removing his wealth and livelihood in an instant.
- A natural disaster killed all ten of his children and their families.
- Then, he himself was afflicted with a miserable skin disease.

His suffering seemed so unfair. And Job was not afraid to express this as he wrestled with the question of God's role in his pain. Notice the bitterness of his words:

> It is all the same, therefore I say,
> "He destroys both the blameless and the wicked."
> If a scourge smites suddenly,
> He mocks the despair of the innocent.
> If the land falls into the hand of the wicked
> He blindfolds the faces of its judges.
> If it is not He, then who is it?
>
> JOB 9:22–24

From Job's perspective, God had caused his pain and suffering while allowing the wicked to live their lives in peace (Job 10:1–3).

If you had been in his situation, how would you have responded? Would you have turned from God? Job's wife advised him, "Are you still holding firmly to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9).

But Job didn't.

In the middle of his agony, Job clung to what he knew about the character of God. Though he didn't understand God's purpose, the cause of his suffering, or the reason for God's silence, Job chose to trust the God he had known for so long. He declared, "Even if [God] slays me, I will wait for Him; I will surely defend my ways before Him" (Job 13:15). He held onto hope (Job 19:25, 26).

Job didn't understand what was happening behind the scenes to cause his suffering. He didn't know that a war had begun long before in heaven, and this war was playing out in his own life.

But it is a war that leaks throughout history like a spreading blot of ink—a war that descends upon you and me today.



Rebellion in Heaven



03

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you love? Maybe it was someone you cared deeply about, such as a spouse, a child, or a trusted friend. You gave your money, your energy, and your time to show them how much you loved them, and yet, they turned away and hurt you.

God also knows the feeling of betrayal. He was betrayed by someone close to Him.

In His kingdom in heaven, He has very special angels who stand beside His throne. These angels are called cherubim (2 Samuel 6:2). The sanctuary built by Moses illustrated this reality: Two golden cherubim were carved on each side of the special ark of the testimony (Exodus/Shemot 25:19–22), which contained the law of God. The Shekhinah

would come down upon it to symbolize God's throne and presence.

Before the creation of our earth, God had an anointed angel, "a guardian cheruv," in heaven called *Heyllel* (bright star) or *ben Shakhar* (son of the dawn) in Hebrew (see Isaiah/Yeshayahu 14:12).

He was in the position closest to God, so he no doubt had a special relationship with Him.

But something began to change in this angel's heart. There's really no way to explain it. Ezekiel 28:14, 15 simply says this about him:

> "You were an anointed
> guardian cheruv.
> I placed you on the holy
> mountain of God.
> You walked among stones of fire.
> You were perfect in your ways
> from the day that you
> were created,
> until unrighteousness was found
> in you."

What was happening in his heart? The passage continues and gives us a hint: "Your heart was exalted because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor" (vs. 17).

Ben Shakhar, son of the dawn, began to feel prideful about his position and beauty. Though he was the second highest in the kingdom of heaven and greatly admired by all the angels, he aspired to a position that didn't belong to him. Isaiah 14:13, 14 tells us that he said in his heart:

> "I will ascend to heaven,
> I will exalt my throne above the
> stars of God.
> I will sit upon the mount
> of meeting,
> in the uttermost parts of
> the north.
> I will ascend above the high
> places of the clouds—
> I will make myself like Elyon."

He coveted God's position and authority. Selfishness and pride were the foundation of his mysterious discontent. And as mentioned earlier, it was unexplainable, because sin (evil) itself is unexplainable; there's no excuse for it. If there were, it would no longer be sin.

This angel, who would become the satan (Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1), began to scheme. He knew that in order to usurp God's position, he would have to undermine God's government and leadership.

To do so, he would have to strike at the principles upon which God's government is based—selfless love and service to others. Because He cares so much about having a loving relationship with His created beings, He gave them freedom of choice—to choose to serve Him or not. After all, love can only exist when there is also freedom.



And this rebellious angel chose to use his freedom to turn from God. Then, to conceal his own evil motives, He misrepresented God as selfish and withholding good from His created beings (we see this in the enemy's words to Eve, one of the first humans, in Genesis/Bereishit 3:1–4). The angel made it seem as though he was looking out for the best interests of the universe, when in reality, he wanted power and praise.

As he began to whisper doubts about God to the other angels, they were confused. This angel was one of the highest angels in the kingdom and had great influence and authority. How could he be wrong?

The silent rebellion soon came into the open.

In the book written by the Jewish prophet John, we find additional insight:

> "And war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels making war against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought, but they were not strong enough, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down—the ancient serpent, called the devil and satan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Revelation 12:7–9).

God's Plan to Stop the Rebellion

You may be asking: *Why didn't God stop the rebellion immediately?* He could have destroyed the satan and the angels that followed him instead of merely banishing them from heaven.

But here's the dilemma that God had: If He had immediately destroyed the rebels, the other angels would have begun to question God. They would have wondered whether God had been fair. They might have thought, *Perhaps this glorious cheruv was right all along*, and thus, the thoughts of doubt and rebellion would not have been eradicated from the universe.

Something terrible would have happened in God's kingdom of love. Love would have been replaced by fear. The remaining angels would have only continued obeying and serving God out of fear of being destroyed.

God didn't want this kind of obedience. He wanted them to serve Him because they enjoyed their relationship with Him and made the choice to love Him. Their allegiance must rest on a conviction of His character of love and justice.

How do we know that God wants this kind of loving relationship with His people?

Repeatedly throughout the Tanakh, God expresses the desire for His people to love Him with all their hearts. Notice these words in the *shema*: "Love *Adonai* your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words, which I am commanding you today, are to be on your heart" (Deuteronomy/Devarim 6:5, 6).

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of God's desire to draw His people to Himself instead of forcing them to serve Him:

> " 'From afar *Adonai* appeared to me.'
> 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love.
> Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness' " (Jeremiah 31:2).

Thus, God needed a way to preserve the freedom of His created beings to choose to love Him.

How would He do this?

Time.

Time would allow God's adversary, the satan, to show his true character of pride and selfishness. Time would also allow evil to mature so that every being in the universe would see the results of setting aside God's law of love. They would see how destructive pride and selfishness truly are.

The satan's plan also had to be allowed to prosper so that the angelic beings and people on earth would be convinced, without force or coercion, of the principles of God's government. They would see God's character of love and

God needed a way to preserve the freedom of His created beings to choose to love Him.

selflessness in sharp contrast to the principles of sin and evil that prevail in this world. They would recognize that God is fair and just. Never again would anyone doubt His character and the principles of His kingdom.

Even though God didn't immediately eradicate sin and sinners, He cast the satan and his angels out of heaven to show that sin will be dealt with, and justice will be given. God won't allow sin to last forever—just long enough for everyone to be convinced that sin leads only to pain and destruction, and that God's law of love is the path to a harmonious life. This conviction in our hearts will make it so that sin never arises in the universe again. Everyone will be forever secure!

But meanwhile, in order to have a universe that is secure from sin, the world has had to experience a costly and painful plan. The satan has been allowed to fully develop his agenda and cause suffering in our world. He is the one responsible for evil. But how did he, a heavenly being, gain access to this earth? We'll look at that part of the story next.



A Paradise Lost



04

Imagine a perfect paradise: a carpet of vibrant green grass, trees swaying gently in the breeze, juicy fruit glistening on their branches, and flowers adding color and joy everywhere. Perhaps a little creek bubbles along, refreshing the environment with its cool water.

In this paradise, everyone lives in harmony with one another. As each person gives to benefit others, there is joy, peace, and rest. All is well. No anger, fighting, or war. No pain, suffering, or evil.

Doesn't this sound like a world you would like to live in? Yes, it does!

We are drawn to concepts of paradise. Could it be that our hearts long for it because we were created for a life like this?

When God made the earth, He made a perfect environment and pronounced it "very good"

(Genesis 1:31). In this world, love was the ultimate motive. Relationships were important. We see this in the way that God created humans.

Genesis tells us that God took a personal interest in us. He even knelt down in the soil of the garden and formed the first man, Adam, with His own hands. Then, He breathed His own breath into Adam's nostrils and lungs (Genesis 2:7).

This example illustrates how God longs for closeness with everyone in His kingdom. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had this closeness with Him as they spent time together face to face.

Sadly, that connection was soon cut off, and the earth lost its perfection—but not because of any error on God's part. Remember, the earth was "very good" when He created it. Instead, an enemy came and introduced evil.

God gave Adam and Eve an opportunity to choose whether to obey or disobey Him. He provided hundreds of beautiful trees for them to eat from in the Garden of Eden. Only one tree was restricted, and that was a tree that the satan was allowed access to:

> "Then *Adonai Elohim* commanded the man saying, 'From all the trees of the garden you are most welcome to eat. But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you must not eat. For when you eat from it, you most assuredly will die!' " (Genesis 2:16, 17).

By this point, the rebellion had already taken place in heaven, and the satan and his angels had been cast to the earth (Revelation 12:7–9). You may wonder: *Why did God allow the satan access to this earth?*

As already mentioned earlier, God cares about freedom of choice because He wants a loving relationship with His created beings. He knows that love is only possible when individuals have a choice to love. Furthermore, if God hadn't allowed humanity to choose, then the satan could have accused God of unfairness and, ultimately, selfishness.

The tree had to be part of God's plan to bring a complete end to sin. Yet, the temptation was not a difficult one. By only allowing the satan access to one tree, God did everything possible to protect Adam and Eve—just like parents seek to protect their children from harm. But in the end, God could not take away their freedom of choice.

The Entrance of Evil

One day, Eve was near the tree when she heard a voice speak to her: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from all the trees of the garden?' " (Genesis 3:1).

It might have surprised her to see a serpent speaking to her. This was not usual from an animal. In



fact, it was the enemy in disguise. The satan, who had been thrown down from heaven (Isaiah 14:12), was now undermining God as he spoke to His created beings.

By implying that God had not allowed access to *all* the trees of the garden, he was trying to create doubt in Eve's mind. Wasn't God selfish? Wasn't He holding something back from her?

Eve responded: "Of the fruit of the trees, we may eat. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat of it and you must not touch it, or you will die' " (Genesis 3:2, 3).

The serpent continued to insert more doubts in her mind: "You most assuredly won't die! For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vss. 4, 5). With these words, he made God seem like a liar who didn't want Adam and Eve to experience higher privileges.

Through his subtle words, the serpent attacked the very character of God.

Instead of trusting what she knew about God, Eve chose to doubt. She accepted the serpent's words. Genesis 3:6 tells us:

Through his subtle words, the serpent attacked the very character of God.

> "Now the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a thing of lust for the eyes, and that the tree was desirable for imparting wisdom. So she took of its fruit and she ate. She also gave to her husband who was with her and he ate."

In this way, the enemy found access to this world and began causing evil and suffering here.

Immediately, sin began to affect the first humans. Their natures became selfish with the tendency to obey the satan and his principles rather than God. As a result, their relationship with God was damaged. Weighed by guilt, Adam and Eve hid from God when He came to spend time with them in the garden (Genesis 3:8). Fear had replaced the love they once had for Him.

Sin also affected human relationships. When God asked Adam and Eve what they had done, they began casting blame on one another, and even on God. Later, they felt sorrow as one of their sons killed their other son. The pain of evil became an ever-present part of their lives.

Furthermore, nature suffered from evil's entrance to earth. Instead of only producing beautiful flowers and shrubs, the earth began producing thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18). Animals came to fear humans and preyed upon one another.

Sin had arrived on the earth to ruin the beautiful world and cause suffering. As Rav Ami said, "There is no death without sin; were a person not to sin, he would not die. And there is no suffering without iniquity."[1]

Instead of the world being full of pure goodness alone, humans would have to face evil—around them and in their hearts. Pain, death, tension, war, and much more would leave a shadow over their existence.

Even so, God gave Adam and Eve a promise of hope: the world would not always be this way!

The Promise to End Evil

When evil entered the world, God had a plan for dealing with it. He knew that allowing time for evil to mature was the only way to preserve the freedom to love and

uproot it completely from the universe. In this process, He would give the greatest demonstration of love—which He first promised to Adam and Eve after the Fall.

God addressed the serpent:

> "Because you [deceived
> the woman],
> Cursed are you above all
> the livestock
> and above every animal of
> the field.
> On your belly will you go,
> and dust will you eat
> all the days of your life.
> I will put animosity
> between you [the serpent] and
> the woman—
> between your seed and her seed.
> He will crush your head,
> and you will crush his heel"
> (Genesis 3:14, 15).

We know that the serpent here represents the enemy—the satan—who has been causing evil and suffering throughout history. God prophesied that there would be war between the satan and the seed of the woman.

Who does this seed represent? Scholars in the Jewish community understand that this seed refers to none other than the Mashiach. Here, God was providing a messianic promise. In this war, the Mashiach would come and crush the head of the serpent. He would triumph in the end.

But to bring about this victory, the Mashiach's heel would be crushed, meaning he would have to experience pain and suffering himself. We'll understand more about that aspect of the prophecy in Chapter 6 of this magazine.

For now, we recognize that the evil in our world is the result of Adam and Eve's choice to sin. The satan, not God, brought evil to our world. But the good news is that God has a plan to deal with this evil and restore our world to perfection, as described by the prophet Isaiah: "Then I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people. No longer will the voice of weeping or the voice of crying be heard in her" (Isaiah 65:19).

As we witness how evil has spread through the generations of God's people, we see its destructive results in comparison with God's goodness. It makes us long to live in that paradise once again.

Reference

1. Talmud, Shabbat 55a.



The Battle Between Good and Evil Continued



05

Joseph (Yosef HaTzadik) was a young man of promise. He was his father's favorite—loved above all his brothers. And he knew it.

His brothers knew it too—and it filled them with envy.

"We have to do something to get him out of the way," they schemed. Their evil scheming led them to sell their brother into slavery in a foreign nation, and then lie about it.

Forced to leave everything familiar to him, Joseph found himself a slave in the home of a wealthy dignitary. He was no longer the cherished son he had once been.

But Joseph determined to make the most of his circumstances. Eventually, he was promoted to the highest position in his master's house—that is,

until he was accused of a crime he never committed and thrown into a dungeon.

He didn't seem to have much hope at this point. But an act of kindness toward another prisoner who had worked in the palace soon landed him in the court of the nation's king. Joseph found himself second-in-command in the nation and its savior during a time of famine. His brothers had intended to destroy his life through their evil actions, but in the end, Joseph helped to save his whole family from the famine.

This kind of storyline—good triumphing over evil—is not new.

Stories of good versus evil have filled countless storybooks. Today, movies follow a similar narrative: A character faces an enemy or evil circumstances, which he or she must overcome in order to save a loved one or a kingdom. Good triumphs over evil, even though in the course of the story it seems as though evil might win.

That story about Joseph—which we find in the Torah (Genesis 37–50)—stirs our hearts because we long for the same kind of triumph in our struggles.

So, why do we feel so strongly about these stories? God has placed these sentiments within our hearts to remind us of His promise that good will at last triumph over evil. We look forward to the end of evil, pain, and suffering because that's the kind of world we were created for.

But this battle has played out in the lives of every individual up until our time, and it will continue that way until the final triumph. We'll see this storyline as we look at accounts that followed Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God.

Cain and Abel

Adam and Eve immediately saw the effects of sin in their relationship with one another. Sadly, they began to see those effects in their family, too.

The attitude of rebellion that the satan cherished in his heart began to appear in Cain.

When Eve gave birth to her first son, she named him Cain and exclaimed, "I produced a man with *Adonai*." She must have thought that he would be the promised Mashiach.

She would be severely disappointed.

The attitude of rebellion that the satan cherished in his heart began to appear in Cain. God noticed this pride and animosity in Cain's heart.

One day, Cain and his brother Abel brought their offerings before God. Genesis 4:3–7 explains:

> "So it happened after some time that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to *Adonai*, while Abel—he also brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. Now *Adonai* looked favorably upon Abel and his offering, but upon Cain and his offering He did not look favorably. Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell. Then *Adonai* said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, it will lift. But if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the doorway. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.' "

The war between good and evil was taking place in Cain's heart. Would he humble himself before God and turn from evil? Or would he choose to continue in his rebellion?

Cain chose the latter. In his anger, he turned against his brother Abel, who was faithful to God. "While they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (vs. 8).

Even though Cain was only one generation removed from the beautiful paradise of Eden, he turned from God and even committed murder. In the battle between good and evil, he chose evil.

This evil played out in the generations that followed as rebellion quickly spread throughout the world.

The Days Before the Flood

The satan's principles of self-exaltation and pride lead to rebellion and evil. And if followed long enough, they would cause terrible destruction. Already, the universe was beginning to see the results.

As Cain's descendants spread throughout the earth, they rejected God and followed their own selfish ways. Just like Cain, they didn't embrace God's principles of love and selflessness.

> "Then *Adonai* saw that the wickedness of humankind was great on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil all the time. So *Adonai* regretted that He made humankind on the earth, and His heart was deeply pained" (Genesis 6:5, 6).



Seeing the earth in this condition was painful for God. Even as His creation suffered, He suffered with it.

The earth "was ruined before God, and . . . filled with violence" (vs. 11). God knew that if He didn't intervene, the people on earth were so violent that they would cause untold misery. In mercy, He chose to bring a flood on the earth to end the evil.

Despite all this evil, God still had faithful people on the earth. Noah was one of them. God provided a way for Noah and his family to be saved by instructing them to build an ark. Unfortunately, not all of Noah's descendants remained faithful to God, so the battle between good and evil continued in future generations.

The People of Babel

"Come! Let's build ourselves a city, with a tower whose top reaches into heaven. So let's make a name for ourselves, or else we will be scattered over the face of the whole land."

These were the words of a group of people who developed from the line of Noah after the flood (Genesis 11:4). How quickly they forgot God and began to rebel against him and his instruction to spread throughout the earth! They decided to congregate together and build a city where they could exalt themselves.

This story, like the ones before it, shows us how easily humans drift toward evil when they choose not to follow God. We will see this same pattern repeated even in the Israelite nation, whom God had chosen as His special people.

The Cycle of Evil

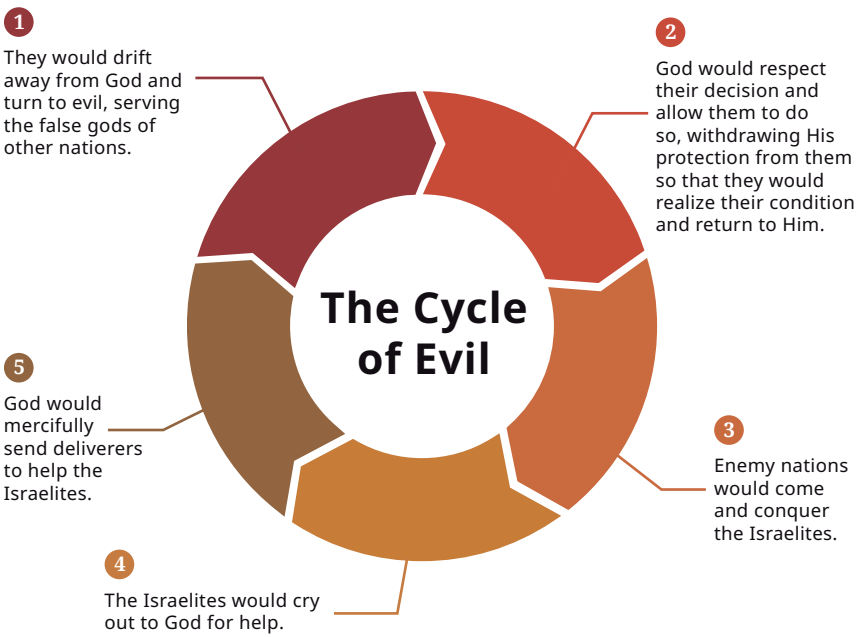
Generations passed, and the war between good and evil did not lessen. But God always had a small group of people on the earth who remained faithful to Him. These people showed the results of living according to God's principles and commandments. They had a close relationship with God and experienced His love.

One of these individuals was the patriarch Abraham. God called him to leave his country and his family and go to a land where his descendants would become a great nation. This nation would be God's special people. Through them, the whole world would be blessed because God would commit to them His truth and His law, and the Mashiach would come from among them. God told Abraham:

> "My heart's desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3).

Over time, Abraham's descendants did grow into a great nation—the nation of Israel. But like many before them, they struggled in the war between good and evil.

When the Israelites inherited the land of Canaan and settled there, they began to experience a cycle:



But before long, the next generation of Israelites would repeat the cycle of evil again. Judges/Shoftim 2:17–19 records:

> "They quickly turned aside from the way in which their fathers walked in obeying the commandments of *Adonai*; they did not do so. Whenever *Adonai* raised judges up for them, *Adonai* was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For *Adonai* was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and crushed them. But when the judge died, they would keep turning back and acted more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods, worshipping them, and bowing down to them. They abandoned none of their practices and stubborn ways."

This war of good and evil reveals itself all throughout the Tanakh. One especially clear example of this controversy is found in the story of Job. Earlier, we saw Job's cry for justice in his suffering. But now, we'll see what was happening behind the scenes.

Tested by the Enemy

Job was a wealthy man who owned "7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys" (Job 1:3). He was considered the "greatest of all people of the East" (vs. 3)—not only because of his wealth but also because of his character. The Tanakh describes him as "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (vs. 1).

Serving God was central to Job's life. He was a man of prayer, and "he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings" on behalf of his children" (vs. 5).

One day, Job's integrity became a conversation in a heavenly council: "The sons of God came to present themselves before *Adonai*, and the *satan* also came with them" (vs. 6).

God questioned the satan: "Where have you come from?"

The satan responded, "From roaming the earth and from walking on it" (vs. 7). With these words, he claimed the earth as his. He had come to the council to represent what he believed to be his domain.

And yet in his domain, there was someone who did not serve him.

Serving God was central to Job's life.

God pointed this out to him: "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth—a blameless and upright man, who fears God and spurns evil" (vs. 8).

The satan is quick to accuse:

> "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, his household, and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has, and he will certainly curse You to Your face!" (vss. 9–11).

It's as though he is saying, "No wonder Job serves You! You have blessed him. Job is only serving You because of everything You do for him. If You take his blessings away, he will turn from You."

God responds to the satan in this way: "Everything he has is in your hand. Only do not extend your hand against him!" (vs. 12) God allows him to do his evil deeds, but there is a boundary he cannot pass: he is not allowed to take Job's life.

Why did God *allow* the enemy to touch Job's life and cause suffering

to him? The key word here is "allow." God does not cause evil, but He allows it. He must allow evil to come to maturity so that all beings on heaven and earth can see how terrible sin truly is. It is part of His plan to put a complete end to evil. If God had not allowed the enemy to touch Job, he would have said that it was an unfair situation. He would have argued that Job didn't really love God—only what he received from God.

But God trusted Job. God believed that His relationship with Job was deeper and stronger than suffering. And Job proved this to be true. As he lost his livestock and then his children, he didn't turn from God. Instead, he "tore his robe, shaved his head, fell to the ground, and worshiped" (vs. 20). He blessed the name of God:

> "Naked I came from my
> mother's womb,
> and naked I will return there.
> *Adonai* gave and *Adonai* has
> taken away;
> blessed be the Name of *Adonai*"
> (vs. 21).

Job didn't understand what was happening to him. He didn't know that the satan was behind his suffering. Thus, he incorrectly believed that God had taken away his blessings. Even with this misunderstanding, Job still chose to trust God. "Through all this, Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God" (vs. 22).

But Job's trial was not over.

Chapter 2 describes another heavenly council. Again, the satan arrives and claims dominion over the earth (vss. 1, 2). God points out that Job has remained faithful to Him: "Have you noticed My servant Job?. . . he still holds firmly to his integrity" (vs. 3).

The satan scoffs, "A man will give up all he has for his own life. But now, stretch out Your hand and strike his bone and his flesh, and he will certainly curse You to Your face!" (vss. 4, 5).

How does God respond this time? Again He permits the satan to work but requires him to spare Job's life (vs. 6).

This time, the satan afflicts Job with boils all over his body. All Job can do is sit among ashes and scrape the boils with a "piece of broken pottery" (vs. 8). His friends come to comfort him, but after a while, they begin to accuse Job of having done something to bring the suffering upon himself.

Even so, Job refuses to give up his trust in God. "Through all this Job did not sin with his lips" (vs. 10). As we saw earlier, Job wrestled to understand his situation. He cried out to God. He didn't understand why he was facing all these calamities.

God seemed silent in the face of Job's suffering. Where was He?



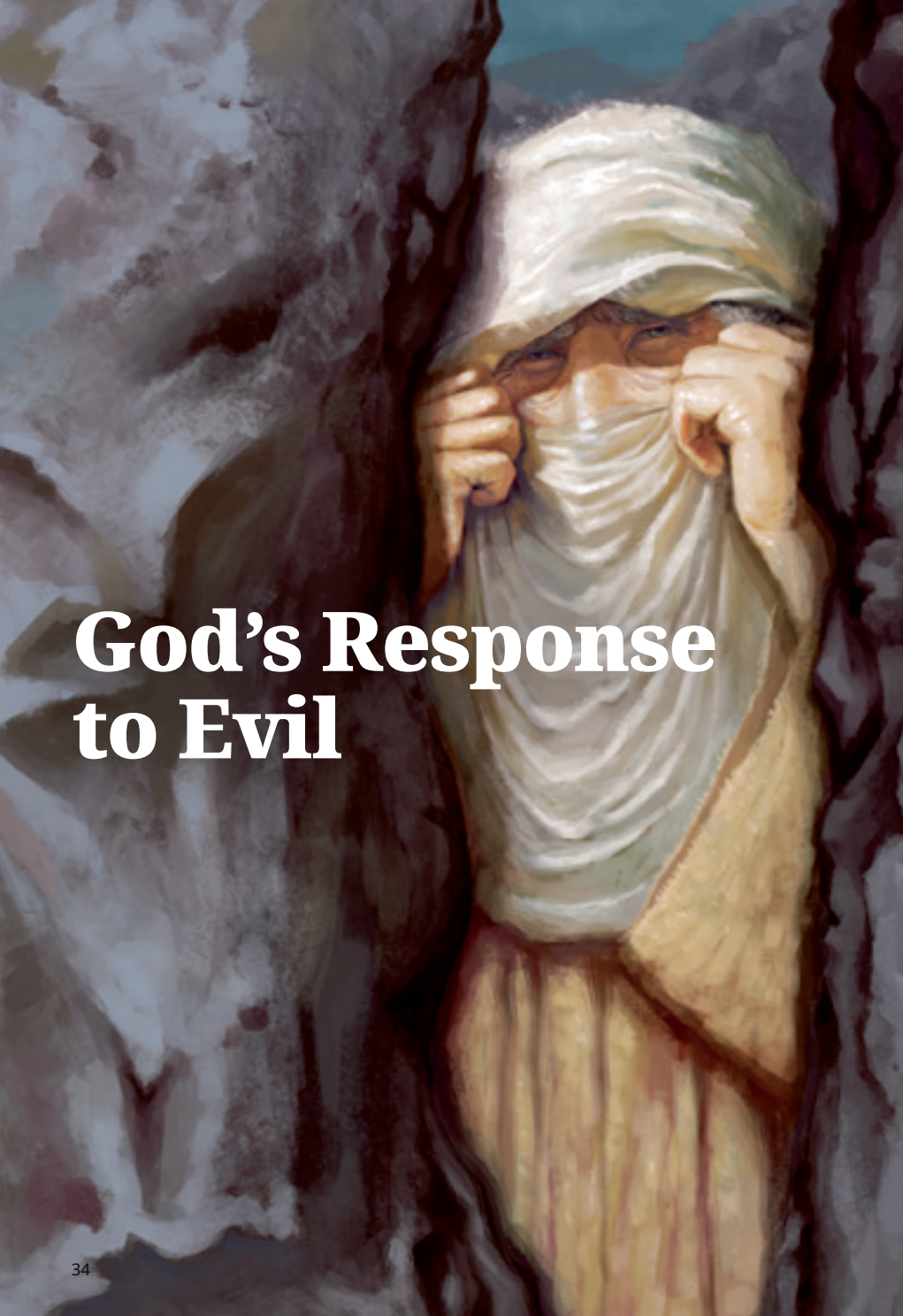
All along, He truly was there. Near the end of the book of Job, God speaks to him and declares His power and might (see Job 38–41). His words strengthen Job to trust Him, no matter the circumstances.

When Job's test was complete, God "restored what Job had lost . . . and doubled everything that Job had before" (Job 42:10). That included his health and wealth. He also had ten more children. Once again, he experienced God's blessing and lived many more satisfying years. But now, Job loved Him more deeply and served Him because of His character of love.

This story was recorded to help us understand the reason behind suffering. We can clearly see that the satan—not God—was the agent of evil in this narrative. The satan wanted to hurt Job for no reason, all the while casting the blame on God.

He still does the same today. But as in the case of Job, God sets limits to how far he can go. Furthermore, God takes the afflictions, and He can use them for good in our lives. As Job himself said, "If He tested me, I would come out as gold" (Job 23:10). He recognized the character development and deeper trust in God that resulted from the difficult trial.

And because Job trusted in God, the accusations against Job and against God proved false. The satan was defeated—a foreshadowing of his ultimate defeat.



God's Response to Evil



06

As we have looked at the story behind this great war between God and the satan, we've begun to understand why God may seem silent in our suffering. We've learned the following:

- God isn't the source of evil. He created a perfect world.
- God allows freedom of choice because His government is based upon His law of love.
- A beautiful angel in heaven chose to rebel against God and become the satan. In doing so, he sought to undermined God's character and law of love.
- God had a plan in place to end evil forever, but this plan would require time to allow everyone in the universe to see the true characters of God and the satan.

› Adam and Eve exercised their freedom of choice and doubted God, thus bringing evil into our world.
› The satan is focused on bringing suffering to this Earth while making it seem that God is to blame for our pain.

Remember, the satan's goal is to attack the character of God. He led the angels in heaven to doubt God's character. He led Adam and Eve to doubt God's character. And he tries to lead us to doubt God's character. More than ever, we need to understand who God really is. The Torah helps us do that.

The Character of God

One story in the Torah that highlights the character of God is found in Exodus 33, 34. There, the prophet Moses makes an audacious request. He says to God, "Please, show me Your glory!" (Exodus 33:18).

God agrees: "I will cause all My goodness to pass before you, and call out the Name of *Adonai* before you. I will be gracious toward whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will be merciful" (vs. 19).

The next morning, Moses went up on Mount Sinai, where "*Adonai* descended in the cloud, stood with him there, as he called on the Name of *Adonai*. Then *Adonai* passed before him" (Exodus 34:5, 6).

As God's glory passed before Moses, God proclaimed these words: "*Adonai*, *Adonai*, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth, showing mercy to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means leaving the guilty unpunished" (vss. 6, 7).

Let's list those traits, which encompass God's glory, name, and character. They are often referred to by the Jewish community as the 13 attributes of God:[1]

1. Adonai!
2. Adonai!
3. God.
4. Compassionate.
5. Gracious.
6. Slow to anger.
7. Abundant in lovingkindness.
8. Truth.
9. Showing mercy to a thousand generations.
10. Forgiving iniquity.
11. Forgiving transgression.
12. Forgiving sin.
13. Who cleanses.[2]

We see God as a personal and loving God who cares deeply about His people. He must uphold truth and justice, but He also exercises

grace, compassion, and forgiveness toward those who seek Him.

The sanctuary system, given to Moses by God, also reveals the character of God. The sanctuary was a way for God to be among His people (Exodus 25:8). It symbolized how sin was forgiven, and it foreshadowed the Mashiach, who would come and bring an end to sin and evil. (Note: To learn more about this sanctuary system, please see the following magazines: "The Suffering Servant" and "The Spirit of Yom Kippur.")

But one question remains to be answered: if this is truly the character of God, then where is God when we suffer?

How God Works Through Our Suffering

We often feel that God is distant when we suffer. In this sense, we can relate to Elie Wiesel, who couldn't even pray to God in the midst of his pain. But could it be that God is not as far from us as we think? Let's look at some evidence from the Tanakh.

As a young shepherd boy, King David wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4). At the point of writing those words, he had not yet experienced much suffering, though he would soon begin to understand that "valley of the shadow of death."

Later, he was hunted by King Saul and forced to flee and live in hiding. When he at last became king, his son rebelled against him and tried to take the kingdom, forcing David to flee again. These were just some of the calamities he experienced. Yet David's tone had not changed from when he was a boy. He still believed God was with him:

> "This I know—that God is for me.
> In God—I keep praising
> His word—
> in *Adonai*—I keep praising
> His word—
> in God I trust, I will not be afraid.
> What can man do to me?"
> (Psalm 56:10–12).

God had not forgotten David, and David knew that. Similarly, God has not forgotten our sufferings. He grieves when He witnesses evil

God has not forgotten our sufferings. He grieves when He witnesses evil and suffering.

and suffering (Genesis 6:5, 6). And He promises to be there to comfort us in our suffering and give us hope for something better:

> "For *Adonai* will comfort Zion.
> He will comfort all her
> waste places.
> He will make her wilderness
> like Eden,
> her desert like the garden
> of *Adonai*.
> Joy and gladness will be found
> in her,
> thanksgiving and a sound of
> melody" (Isaiah 51:3).

God doesn't waste the pain and suffering we go through. Though He doesn't want us to suffer, and He limits how much the satan is allowed to work—as we saw in the story of Job—, He also uses it in various ways in our lives. Often, difficult experiences help us grow the most—they reveal our weaknesses, show us our need for the Almighty, and develop in us the character of love that God wants us to have. Job recognized that God was putting him through the refining process so that he could become like "gold" (Job 23:10).

But beyond simply grieving with or comforting us, or using trials for our good, God does something greater—so great that we struggle to comprehend it:

He sends the Mashiach to suffer for us.

It's all part of His plan to end the war between good and evil and eradicate sin and suffering forever.

God Suffers for Us

Sin, evil, and God's adversary the satan have been the cause of suffering for the past few thousand years of this earth's history. But we know that when Adam and Eve doubted and disobeyed God, He gave them a promise: A Mashiach would come to crush the head of the satan. He would be victorious over evil. But in the process, the Mashiach's heel would be crushed.

How would this occur? A prophecy of the Mashiach in Isaiah 53 shows us that he will overcome evil by carrying our sin and evil upon himself. He himself will suffer because of our sins:

> "Surely He has borne our griefs
> and carried our pains.
> Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
> struck by God, and afflicted.
> But He was pierced because of
> our transgressions,
> crushed because of our iniquities.
> The chastisement for our shalom
> was upon Him,
> and by His stripes we are healed.
> We all like sheep have
> gone astray.
> Each of us turned to his own way.
> So *Adonai* has laid on Him the
> iniquity of us all.
> He was oppressed and He was
> afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4–7).

> ***The chastisement for our shalom was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.***
>
> ISAIAH 53:5

The prophet Daniel also prophesied the exact time at which the Mashiach would come and be "cut off" for his people (Daniel 9:24–26). (Note: See the magazine "Two Different Mashiachs?" to learn more about the prophecies Yeshua fulfilled.)

This indeed happened. No one in history has fulfilled these prophecies of the Mashiach as well as one man: Yeshua. Instead of ignoring our suffering or watching it from a distance, God chose to intervene by sending Yeshua.

When He sent Yeshua to suffer and die for our sins, He was joining us in our affliction. The prophet Isaiah tells us: "In all their affliction He was afflicted. So the angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, then He lifted them and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9).

By suffering for us and with us, Yeshua is able to comfort us because he can relate to us. He also showed the true character of God to all the universe and disproved the satan's accusations that God was selfish. As God's angels watched the Mashiach die on that agonizing day, they saw through the lies and deception of the satan and lost any sympathy they may have had for him. The Mashiach's self-sacrifice helped them to see that God is truly a God of love and freedom.

Above all, his death guaranteed that the cause of suffering would be defeated. Like the promise given to Adam and Eve, the serpent would be crushed. By dying for us as the Mashiach, Yeshua is able to bring justice for those who have been wronged.

The Mashiach Brings Justice

Anger filled Joanna's heart as she sat in her house alone. Sitting at a table, she stared at the photo of her husband—who had been there with her only a few weeks before. Now, he was gone.



"It's not fair," Joanna sobbed. Her husband had been killed by a drunk driver. The driver had lost control of his vehicle while turning a corner and ran straight into her husband's vehicle, killing him on impact.

Joanna wondered if she could ever forgive this individual who had changed the course of her life. She was bitter and resentful. She wanted justice in the midst of her suffering.

The good news is that this justice is available through the Mashiach. He promises to bring justice for us in our suffering. Because he has been with us in our suffering, he is the most qualified to be our judge.

The prophet Daniel received a vision in which he saw God's people facing mistreatment. This power "was waging war against the *kedoshim* and overpowering them" (Daniel 7:19).

But this persecution was only allowed for a time "until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was rendered in favor of the *kedoshim* of the Most High—when the time came and the *kedoshim* possessed the kingdom" (vs. 22).

In the same vision, Daniel saw the Mashiach coming to the judgment with God the Father. Verses 9 and 10 set the stage for a judgment scene by mentioning a court being seated and books being opened. Then, we read the following:

"I was watching in the
night visions.
Behold, One like a Son of Man,
coming with the clouds
of heaven.
He approached the Ancient
of Days,
and was brought into
His presence.
Dominion, glory and sovereignty
were given to Him
that all peoples, nations, and
languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting
dominion that will never
pass away,
and His kingdom is one that
will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13, 14).

God's People Will Be Victorious

Similar to Daniel's visions, the prophet Yochanan speaks in the Jewish and inspired apostolic writings of a power that will seek to persecute God's people right before the time of the Mashiach's return as victor.

This religious-political power is symbolized by a beast (Daniel 7:17). This beast will cooperate with the enemy of all—the satan, known as a dragon—to make war with those who "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua" (Revelation 12:17).

Through this power, the satan will try to force everyone on earth to worship him: "All who dwell on the earth shall worship

him—everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain" (Revelation 13:8).

But there is a group of people who will be faithful to Yeshua, who is called the Lamb because he became the sacrifice for sin. They will overcome the satan "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even in the face of death" (Revelation 12:11).

The satan will be finally and fully cast down because Yeshua, the Lamb of God, will give power to the faithful people to overcome. Because of their love for God, they will choose to be faithful to him instead of allowing evil to remain in their lives. Like Job, they will show that they trust in the goodness of God.

Then, at that time, when God's people feel that they can no longer continue to suffer, Yeshua will return as the victorious Mashiach who will overcome the enemy.

These words describe this scene and the way that Yeshua will fulfill the prophecy of the Mashiach in Daniel 7:

> "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The One riding on it is called Faithful and True, and He judges and makes war in righteousness. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and many royal crowns are on His head. He has a name written that no one knows except Himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is the Word of God" (Revelation 19:11–13).

Yeshua arrives as a victorious prince on a horse. But notice that his robe will be dipped in blood—a symbol of the suffering that he has experienced to bring justice for his people.

At last, the serpent will be crushed, and the enemy will be overcome. The prophecy of Ezekiel 28:18, 19 will be fulfilled—the satan will be "turned . . . to ashes" and become "nothing forever." All evil and sin will be destroyed permanently, never to rise up again (Psalm 37:20; Nahum 1:9; Malachi 4:1).

Yochanan goes on to describe the restoration of the earth. It will be beautiful like Eden once again, and we will be able to live there (see Revelation 21–22). It will be a place of peace, free of sorrow: "Then I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people. No longer will the voice of weeping or the voice of crying be heard in her" (Isaiah 65:19).

Similar to the writings of the prophets in the Tanakh, the apostle John writes:

> "Behold, the dwelling of God is among men,



and He shall tabernacle
among them.
They shall be His people,
and God Himself shall be
among them
and be their God.
He shall wipe away every tear
from their eyes,
and death shall be no more.
Nor shall there be mourning or
crying or pain any longer,
for the former things have
passed away" (Revelation
21:3, 4).

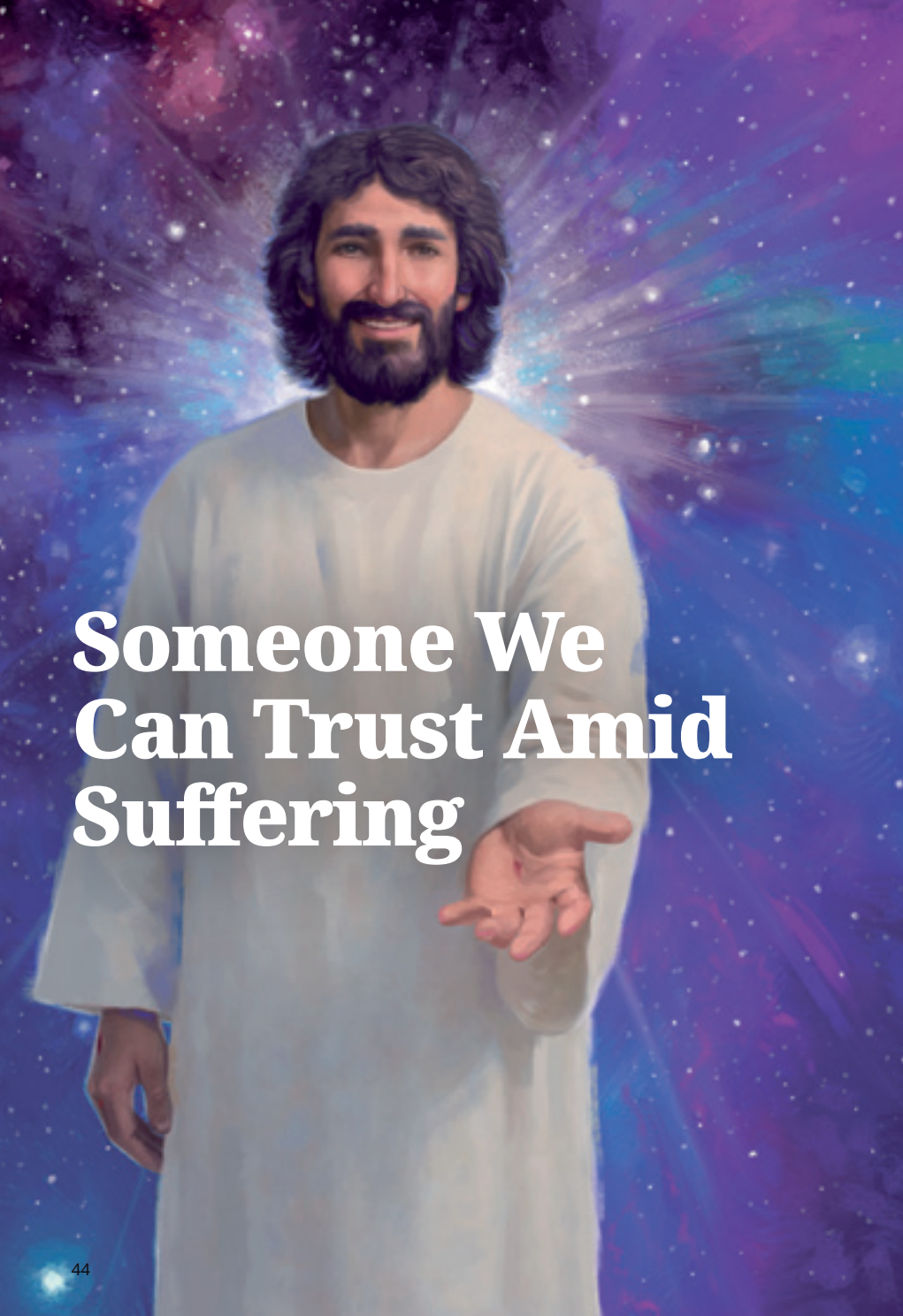
What a beautiful place that will be!

But right now, it seems so far away. When we look around the world, we see so much evil and pain. This is because the satan knows that he has a short time and is attacking the earth's inhabitants, especially God's people, with great rage (Revelation 12:12).

And yet, we can cling to the promise of the Mashiach—Yeshua—who has suffered and died for us and will come again as a victorious judge. It's a hope that will strengthen us through our present suffering.

References

1. Ronald L. Eisenberg, "The 13 Attributes of Mercy," ***My Jewish Learning***, myjewishlearning.com.
2. This last attribute is included in some versions of the Torah.



Someone We Can Trust Amid Suffering



07

Elie Wiesel marched back from another day of grueling labor at Birkenau Concentration Camp. As he returned, he noticed something was different. Three gallows had been prepared in the middle of the camp.

A guard took roll call as all the prisoners gathered around. Soldiers stood poised with their guns to make sure no one broke out of line.

Then, three prisoners were brought to the gallows. One of them Elie described as “a sad-eyed angel.” This “angel” was just a little boy—pale and nervously biting his lip.

The victims mounted the chairs and guards placed nooses around their necks. The three were hanged at the same time.

No one said anything as they were forced to watch the scene. Some of the prisoners silently wept.

But worse than the deaths of the two older men was the fact that the little boy was still alive. He had been too light.

In Elie's words, "For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face."

Someone nearby murmured, "Where is God now?"

The words came to Elie's lips: "Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on these gallows."[1]

By his words, Elie seemed to be implying that God was dead; He had not intervened. Little did Elie realize the truth he had spoken.

God had intervened! And He Himself suffered for His people when He sent Yeshua to agonize and die for His people's sins. Thus, that little boy did not suffer alone because someone was there suffering with him.

Today, you may be in pain. You may question the goodness of God. You may be going through difficult experiences and wondering, "Where is God?"

You should know that your question and your pain are valid. As we have seen, many individuals in the Tanakh asked this same question. But God Himself sent Yeshua to suffer with you in that pain. For a time, that suffering is allowed. But someday soon, it will lead the way to the end of all suffering—a beautiful paradise that will never end!

These things are difficult to understand. But the more time we spend getting to know the character of God and how He sent Yeshua to represent Him on this earth and to suffer for us, the more we will trust Him in the midst of our pain. And as we choose to follow Him, we can join in His victory over evil.

Wouldn't you like to be on the side of victory with Yeshua? If so, you can begin by getting to know Him for yourself! Please contact us, using the information on the back of this magazine, and we will be happy to share more with you.

Reference

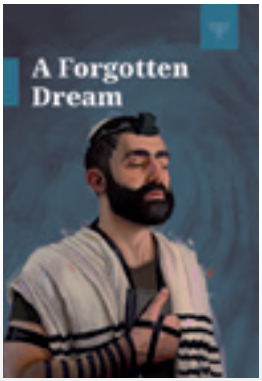
1. Wiesel, ***Night***, pp. 61, 62.

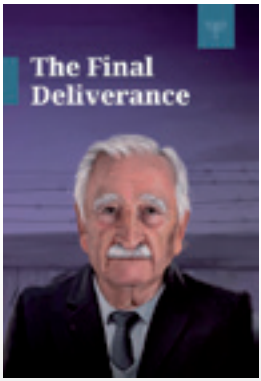
Further Reading













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