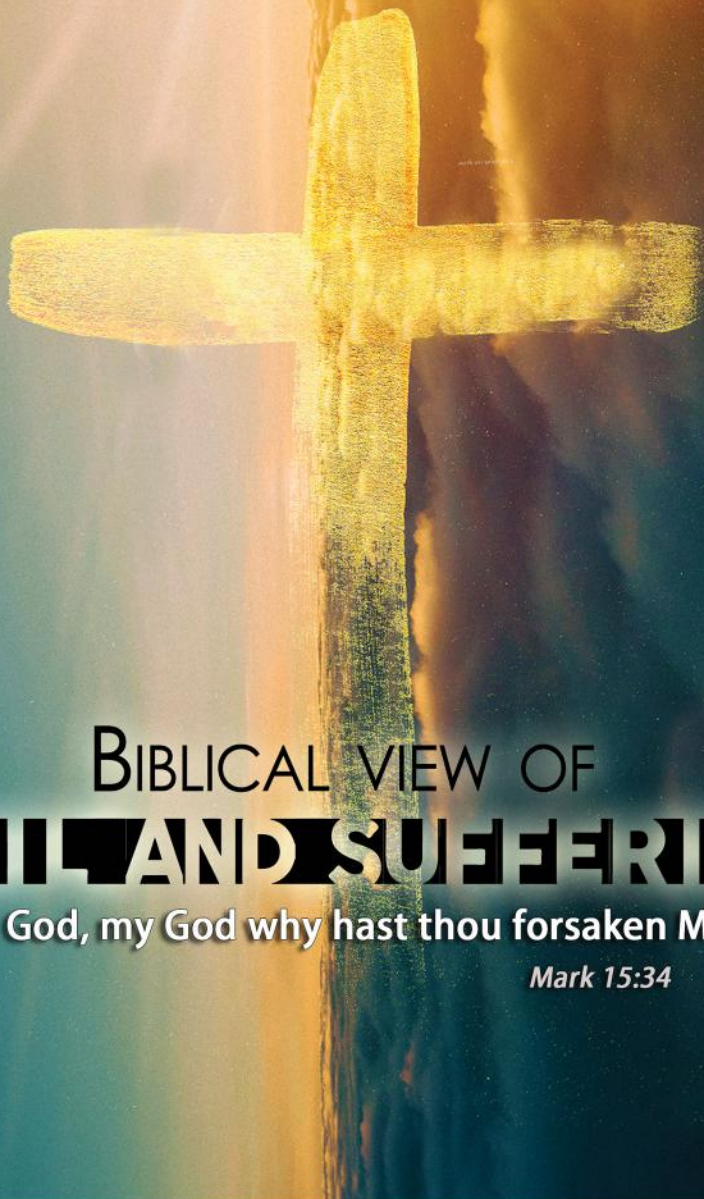




BETHEL AG CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



BIBLICAL VIEW OF **EVIL AND SUFFERING**

My God, my God why hast thou forsaken Me?

Mark 15:34

FOURTH STATEMENT FROM THE CROSS

Biblical Understanding of Evil & Suffering

Mark 15: 34, *"And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')"*

When Christ came, He represented humanity to fulfill all righteousness. He represented us in death, torment, and the atonement of sin. *"For He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

Lord Jesus suffered all of God's wrath, with all the bitterness therein, for all the sins and as a representative of humanity He said, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"*

The word 'Forsaken' in this context is not an act of abandonment by the Father, but the excruciating essence of the torment of crucifixion and God's wrath.

The Son drank willingly of the sacrificial cup that the Father offered Him with the sole statement, *"Your will be done"* and stayed obedient until His death on the Cross. Therefore, Christ's question: *"why have You forsaken Me?"* was not a complaint or protest, but it was only an expression of the reality of His suffering and a declaration of the act of redemption being realised.

When Lord Jesus said: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"*, He tried to remind the Jews of the twenty-second Psalm. **Psalm 22** begins with those exact words and was a prophetic Psalm of David about the crucifixion of the Messiah. The hearers missed the point entirely. To add to this, the hearers thought Lord Jesus was calling Elijah!

Lord Jesus quoted the very first clause and the very last clause of a section of Scripture that they knew very, very well. With His dying breath Lord Jesus affirmed for one more time that He was who the Word of God said He was—the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the Redeemer of Israel, and Him who all in the future would believe.

Is suffering universal?

Everyone suffers. Suffering is a universal feature of the human race. It's not really a question of who will suffer and who won't, but how much and how often.

Suffering is all around us, both visible and invisible. Some bearable and some beyond our natural ability to cope. It can be physical, mental, and/or emotional. It can be short-lived or may last a life time. It can leave scars. It can influence behaviour either positively or negatively: to make us stronger or tear us down. Suffering can be self-induced or brought on by others. Some suffering is deserved (**Daniel 4:1-37; Luke 23:41**) and some undeserved (**Matthew 16:21, 17:12; Mark 9:22; Acts 5:41, 9:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:3-9**)

The presence of suffering in a Christian life doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong in the person's life; on the contrary, the absence of suffering does not indicate that God is pleased. One can be completely in the will of God and yet experience great suffering (1 Peter 4:19), meanwhile another can be completely in sin and be free from great suffering (Psalms 73:1-12). Suffering by itself neither proves godliness nor sin.

What are the factors that cause suffering in this world?

Since the fall of Satan through rebellion, as well as the fall of Adam and Eve through the sin of disobedience, the major sources of suffering include:

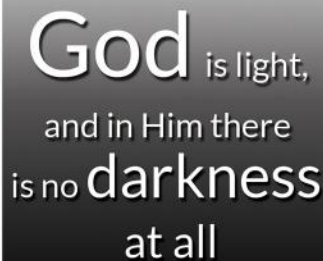
- Satan (Job 1:1-21)
- Oneself (Proverbs 1:22, 8:36, 15:32; Isaiah 3:9; 2 Peter 2:12-15)
- Other people (Genesis 3:1-18; 1 Chronicles 21:14-17; Jonah 1:12)
- Demons (Luke 8:29)

God allows suffering according to His Sovereign plan (1 Samuel 16:14-16; Job 1:21, 2:10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Revelation 19:11-21)

Did God create evil?

No. Scripture says that when God finished His creation, He saw everything and declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). It's misleading to say, "God created Satan and demons." Rather, God created the angel Lucifer and other righteous angels; they chose to rebel against God later and in so doing became Satan and demons. The first human evil occurred when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden as they were free to choose. What followed was the consequence of sin called 'curse' and therefore we live in a fallen world. (Romans 8:22)

Many Scriptures affirm that God is not the author of evil: "God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33). He cannot in any way be the author of evil. *For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.* (Lamentations 3:33)



God is light,
and in Him there
is no darkness
at all

Is Evil and suffering same or different?

People interchange the terms 'bad', 'evil' and 'suffering' as though they are the same. The Bible uses the word 'evil' to describe anything that violates God's moral standards and anyone who chooses anything contrary to God's perfection commits evil. Evil and suffering are mostly the result of free choices that opt the bad route.

'Suffering' is the consequence of 'evil'. But all suffering may not be linked to evil and may not be due to one's sin (**Luke 13:1-4; John 9:1-12**). It's also important to distinguish between two kinds of evil: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil results from the evil actions of humans with one another. Murder, rape, and theft are examples. Natural evil results from natural processes such as earthquakes and flood. Sometimes the two are intermingled.

Why bad things happen to good people?"

We don't know! We don't have to have the cause and effect for everything. Sometimes bad things just happen because we are a part of this imperfect, cursed world. Bad things happen to good people because no one is good. *All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*

God may not give an answer for all our suffering or evil that happens in this world because we are finite and will not understand the infinite mind of God. But our God promised to save you, help you, and comfort you in your pain and suffering.

We lack God's omniscience, omnipotence, wisdom, holiness, justice, and goodness. He is infinite; we are finite

Why does God allow suffering?

Although the Bible informs us how and why suffering came about, it does not tell us why God allowed it to happen.

The Bible tells us that God is all-wise and all-knowing and God's purposes are sometimes beyond our understanding. He has reasons for allowing things to happen beyond our comprehension. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).*

A few reasons why God allows suffering in this imperfect world.

1. God uses suffering to help us grow in our character. *"See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this" (Isaiah 48:10)*

2. God sometimes uses suffering to punish evil. God struck Gehazi, Elisha's servant, with leprosy for lying and for accepting gifts under false pretense (**2 Kings 5:20-27**). God struck down Herod for his pride and arrogance (**Acts 12:19-23**). God struck down Ananias and Sapphira because they lied to the Holy Spirit. (**Acts 5:1-11**)

3. God can use suffering to display His work in you. In **John 9:1-34**, when Christ's disciples asked whose sin lay behind a man born blind, Jesus said, *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned. This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9:3)*

4. Suffering in this life can be a part of our God-given destiny. Voices of Martyrs reports that the 20th century produced more Christian martyrs than the previous nineteen centuries combined. Nearly, two lakhs believers in Christ are executed per year, while millions more suffer in prisons and enforced slavery. (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3, 1 Peter 4:19)

5. God may use suffering to form us into the image of Christ. (Philippians 3:10) God used Christ's suffering, not just his death, to accomplish a purpose: *"Although he [Jesus] was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."* (Hebrews 5:8) In the context of suffering, God says we are *"predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son".* (Romans 8:29)

6. Suffering should draw our attention to the ugliness of sin and its poisonous effects., To grasp redemption's meaning, we must see the devastation of the sin from which God redeems us. (Romans 6:23)

7. Suffering has a way to point us to the hope of the Saviour and eternity. The Resurrected New Heaven and New Earth will be an everlasting, righteous kingdom, which will compensate for all the evils of fallen kingdoms preceding it.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17, *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."*

Why doesn't God explain His Reasons for all the sufferings?

When God takes the microphone in Job's final chapters, we might expect him to defend why He allows evil and suffering. But He doesn't. He simply demonstrates the absurdity of making ourselves His judge. We lack God's omniscience, omnipotence, wisdom, holiness, justice, and goodness. He is infinite; we are finite. He is the Creator; we're the creatures. Shouldn't that say it all? Job had a better basis for complaint than nearly any of us ever will. Yet after listening to Job's grievances, God finally spoke to him: *"Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me"* (Job 38:3)

Is the devil to be blamed for all our sin and suffering?

Satan indeed is the originator of evil and led the first family to sin and disobedience. Jesus called Satan, *"a liar and the father of lies"* and a *"murderer from the beginning"* (John 8:44). Christ also referred to him as *"the evil one"* (Matthew 13:19) and the *"ruler of this world"* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)

Satan is always blamed for everything evil and while there is a certain sense in which that is true, it fails to take into consideration all the other issues like our own personal responsibilities for our own actions. It's too easy for us to blame the devil and excuse ourselves from our actions to say, *"The devil made me do it."* Today, regardless of the various external sources of temptation (Satan and the world), the final source is our own sinful nature or the lusts of self-centred desires of our own hearts (James 1:14-15).

Why wouldn't an all good, all knowing, and all powerful God destroy evil completely?

It is absolutely true that our God is all good, all knowing, and all powerful and nothing is too hard for Him (**Jeremiah 32:17**) but we do not know His reason behind the delay to bring justice and to destroy evil completely.

Revelation 6:10-11, *"They (martyrs in heaven) cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer..."*

Apologist Norman Geisler says, "Sure God could destroy all the evil of the world, but in destroying it, He would destroy good. Because one of the good things God made was freedom. God could destroy all evil, by destroying all freedom, but He would be working against the good He has made."

Jesus said, *"A time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."* (**John 5:28-29**) God says that though final judgment for evil doesn't come here and now, He keeps track of all evil. One day He will judge it decisively (**Romans 2:5-6**). Therefore, no one "gets away with" anything. "A man reaps what he sows" (**Galatians 6:7**) Eternal punishment will come. No one beats the system. Justice delayed is not justice denied.

Is God blamed for all the natural disasters and diseases in this world?

God cannot be blamed. Natural disasters and diseases in this world are general results of the Curse, not specifically linked to the sins of individuals who perish or suffer in them. Jesus made this clear by saying that some people murdered by Pilate and those crushed by a falling tower were no worse sinners than others (**Luke 13:2-5**). In some instances, God brings disaster as punishment to deal with human evil (**Genesis 6:8, 19; Exodus 7:11; Jonah 1:12**) Natural disasters are a megaphone from God to teach us the uncertainty of life. Life is short, eternity is long.

How can I accept that God is loving when I have to handle disabilities or birth defects?

God isn't responsible for things like suffering, bad genes, birth defects, and the general breakdown of our world that happened due to our sin and corruption. It is the consequence of original sin. God imparts ability, and He knows about disability because He at least allows it. But our God doesn't helplessly watch us suffer because of bad genes or an accident that Satan or people caused. He offers us help to deal with any disability He allowed to happen. Jesus will remove all disease, disability, and death from us – but in His time, not ours.

He will rescue us from suffering when He returns to set up His kingdom or when we go to Him in death. So until then, we have no way of knowing whether a disability might be used to honour God and bring the person to greater eternal reward in Heaven.

Does God understand my pain and suffering?

God sees the hurt in your heart like nobody else can and only God knows!

Psalms 56:6 says, *"You know how troubled I am; you have kept a record of my tears."*

God not only sees, He cares! **Psalms 103:13**, *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him."*

Hebrews 4:15, *"For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help".*

It was Martin Luther who said, "When you look around and wonder whether God cares, you must always hurry to the cross and you must see Him there."

We have a God who sees the misery of His people in Egypt and is concerned about their suffering (**Exodus 3:7**), who calms the storms and walks on water, and gives great hope and peace that transcends understanding (**Philippians 4:7**).

God, like a father, doesn't just give advice. He gives Himself. He becomes the Husband to the grieving widow (**Isaiah 54:5**). He becomes the Comforter to the barren woman (**Isaiah 54:1**). He becomes the Father of the orphaned (**Psalms 10:14**). He is the Healer to the sick (**Exodus 15:26**). He is the Wonderful Counsellor to the confused and depressed. (**Isaiah 9:6**)

Do we suffer less because we believe in Lord Jesus?

Many think that when they receive the Lord Jesus Christ, all their problems are over; but God never said that Believers would not suffer problems in this life.

The Lord Jesus did say: *"In the World ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the World"* (**John 16:33**). Romans says that *"in all these things [tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword] we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us"* (**Romans 8:37**).

In this life we will suffer, but *"all things [trouble and pain of all kinds] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called ..."*

(**Romans 8:28**). Christians must keep this principle in mind: short term suffering works for our long term good!

If God protected His children from all storms, disappointments, poverty, and plagues, people would be tempted to serve Him for selfish reasons, as Satan falsely accused Job of doing (**Job 1:10 - 11**). When Paul the apostle asked the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh, the Saviour responded saying, *"My power is perfected in weakness."* (**2 Corinthians 12:7**)

What are the practical ways to respond towards suffering?

First, it should be one of Worship. We ought to say, *"O God, I believe You are the great and mighty God. I don't understand all the things that are happening in my life, but, O God I trust in You."* (**Habakkuk 3:17-19**)

Second, we should ask God to heal and deliver us from the present evil and suffering because He alone is our Healer (**Isaiah 53**)

Third, we should ask God to teach us all He would have us learn about Him, about ourselves, about others during the days of suffering and about how we can minister to those who are suffering in the same context. (**Hebrews 12:10-11**)

Fourth, our attitude in suffering should be to glorify God knowing that He makes all things beautiful and all things work together to them that love God. (**Rom. 8:28**)

Fifth, live a life of faith with our eyes fixed on Lord Jesus and with the hope to reign eternally with God where one day He will completely destroy all the evil and suffering. And He alone is able to do it! (**Hebrews 12:2**)

Sixth, hope to come out of problems and sufferings through wisdom and grace like Joseph, David and Daniel in the Bible. (**Gen 50:20, Psalms 119:71; 34:19, Dan 3:17**)

What is the final triumph of evil and suffering?

God has offered a final triumph over evil and suffering of this world through the death and resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. The promise of resurrection is what overshadows all present evil and suffering and assures its definitive end. Resurrection, and what it means to live forever in the presence of our God, is – or should be – what we live for. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts, and minds. Only in the Gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope.

The challenge before every Christian, especially during times of suffering, is to view all aspects of life in the light of eternity. We must constantly live in the eternal-now, never divorcing our current experiences from our eternal destiny that is assured to us who are in Christ.

At the end of time God will put an end to all suffering and evil when He destroys the existing universe and earth and creates a new universe and new earth (**Revelation 21:1**). At such a time, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will be no longer any death; there will no longer be any mourning or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away"* (**Revelation 21:4**).

Until then, we must look to the Lord.

"Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning!" **Psalms 30:5**

Book References:

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