The background image shows a chaotic war-torn street. In the foreground, a soldier in a green turban and tactical gear is seen from behind, looking towards a group of people. A person in a grey hoodie and green jacket is crouching in the middle ground. To the right, a large fire burns brightly, with thick black smoke rising into the air. In the background, a crowd of people, some wearing head coverings, is visible. A white house is partially obscured by the smoke and fire.

 THE
CHOSEN
PEOPLE
SPECIAL EDITION

HOPE

in suffering

A Jewish Approach to Suffering

Everyone from the angelic-voiced Mahalia Jackson to the great Louis Armstrong sang the traditional African-American spiritual entitled, “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” The lyrics are worth noting:

*Nobody knows the trouble
I’ve seen*

*Nobody knows my sorrow
Nobody knows the trouble
I’ve seen
Glory Hallelujah*

*Nobody knows the trouble
I’ve seen*

*Nobody knows but Jesus
Nobody knows the trouble
I’ve seen
Glory Hallelujah*

This great song poignantly expresses the loneliness and heart-rending nature of suffering. Have you ever tried to tell your story of personal pain to another individual, especially someone who is not very close to you? Have ever you felt like your story sounds hollow and trite as soon as you begin to recount it to someone else, even though the experience was deeply agonizing for you? If you have, then you know the feeling of emptiness when you realize the other person simply cannot appreciate your pain.

In moments like these, when the gap in understanding is so deep and wide, we might just decide to give up explaining and suffer in silence to avoid trying to give good reasons for why we are hurting. Nobody likes having their suffering minimized by someone else’s inability to empathize and feel their pain. We should never be put in the position where we need to justify why life hurts.

The moving lyrics of this old spiritual and its haunting melody breathes authenticity into its testimony of pain. We know it grew out of the bitterness of slavery and a desire to rise above that hateful circumstance and turn our hearts to God who alone understands life’s trials. It is sad but realistic as it seems the only time our hearts reach out to heaven is when life’s solutions are elusive or shrouded in darkness, and we have come to the end of our proverbial rope.

Everyone suffers, but the history of the Jewish people is best understood only through the lens of national suffering. The saying, “They tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat!”—always mentioned with a wry smile—is tender, touching, and true. So much of Jewish life tells the story of survival, celebration, and remembrance. “Never Again”—declared in remembrance of the Holocaust—is a mantra that befits the Jewish experience and helps us seize the future with defiance and hope.

Our Jewish people have been enslaved, persecuted, oppressed, and virtually destroyed during the Holocaust. The prayers, poems, and songs of our people encourage us to turn toward God who is above and beyond all and gives meaning to the pain and suffering that would otherwise be meaningless.

The *Shehechyanu* prayer expresses our corporate gratitude and acceptance of the destiny God allows. Along with heartfelt mourning, our tradition reminds us to be thankful that we are still alive! This sentiment is captured in one of our most familiar prayers when we recite,

*Baruch Atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech Ha’olam, shehechyanu,
v’kiy’manu, v’higianu lazman hazeh.*

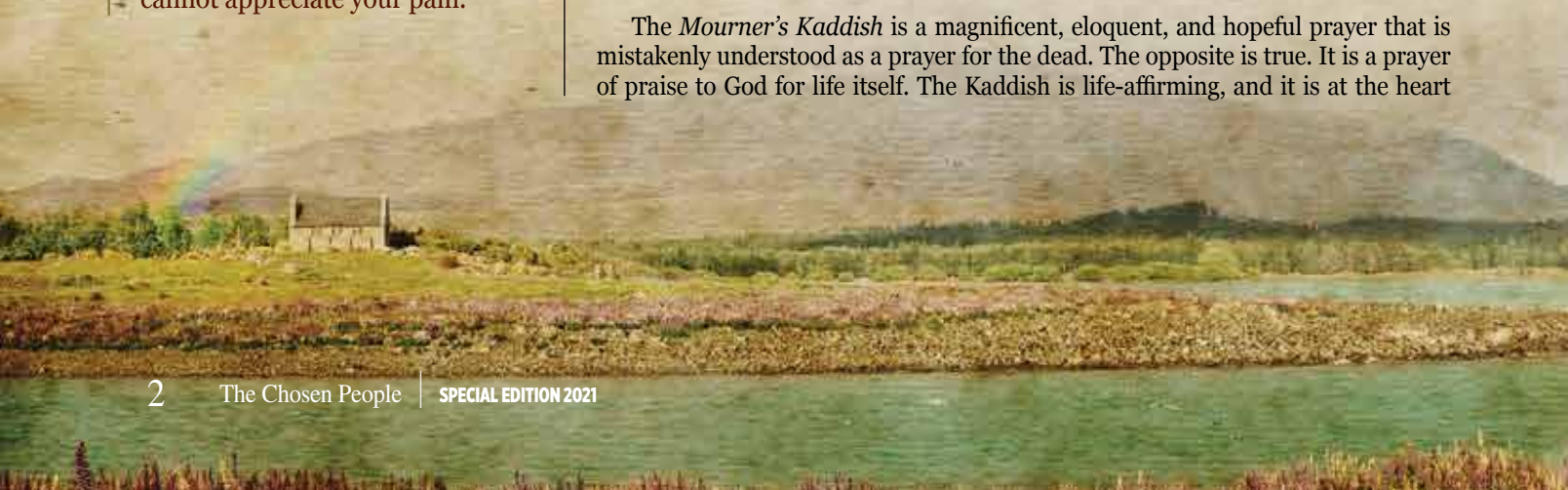
Blessed are You, O Lord our God, who has given us life, sustained us, and allowed us to arrive in this moment.

This traditional Jewish response to good times and bad, to suffering and celebration, is prayed at almost every Jewish holiday. Recognizing God’s hand of protection upon the Jewish people as we have lived to enter another year’s holiday season, it speaks of the faithfulness of God. He is the rock in the midst of our suffering.

The *Mourner’s Kaddish*, another well-known prayer, is prayed at perhaps our greatest times of suffering as we come face to face with the death of a loved one.

There is nothing like death to make us appreciate life.

The *Mourner’s Kaddish* is a magnificent, eloquent, and hopeful prayer that is mistakenly understood as a prayer for the dead. The opposite is true. It is a prayer of praise to God for life itself. The Kaddish is life-affirming, and it is at the heart



of the Jewish response to suffering and death. The Kaddish lifts our hearts as the words we say glorify God and extol the virtues of His divine perfections. The prayer gives voice to

our suffering by reaffirming our acceptance of His plan for us personally and as a people. This acknowledgment enables us to be thankful to God in the face of great loss and the worst of human pain.

The ability to recite the prayer in a heartfelt and sincere way is in itself a victory over the potential emptiness of suffering that can consume us. Although the Mourner's Kaddish is only recited once at the end of synagogue services, versions of the Kaddish are

repeated throughout. At the heart of every variation of the prayer is the following statement about the character of God:

Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, honored, elevated, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He—above and beyond any blessings and hymns, praises, and consolations which are uttered in the world; and say Amen.

When we pray these words together as a family and community, it becomes easier to accept the isolation and desolation of suffering.

I believe this Jewish approach to hope is found in the Bible—in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. The well-worn words of Job, the master of theodicy, enable us to walk into the “whirlwind” of distress with faith and hope in the character of a good and gracious God. Job, in a perfect illustration of submission to God’s will, said, “*Though He slay me, I will hope in Him*” (Job 13:15).

We might understand suffering today in deeper and more profound ways than ever before. COVID-19 has shattered many of our lives in so many ways. Some of us have unfortunately lost loved ones. We have also recently witnessed terrible floods, earthquakes, fires, and wars we thought we would never have to fight again.

Yet, we can have hope in the midst of suffering!

Bitterness, hopelessness, and anger are self-destructive options, but there is a whole range of life-affirming choices we can make as well. We might never quite understand the

why of our pain, but we can still find peace in suffering when we entrust our souls to the God who made us.

The story of Jesus as told in the four Gospels is worth reading as you will see how the God of the universe chose to suffer on our behalf and repair the damage brought about by sin. In fact, He clothed Himself with humanity and endured pain and loss and injustice, just like we experience. He did even more for us. He died for our sins and rose from the grave to pave a new way into the presence of God. His suffering is the ultimate solace for our suffering! Once healed, this new and personal relationship with God through Yeshua the Messiah will become your greatest source of joy and give meaning to your suffering.

As the venerable rabbi and apostle Paul wrote so many years ago,

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3–5)

Like most of us, you are probably suffering in one way or another today. How can you avoid it? You do not have to be a weak person to suffer—we all have our limits. Loss and disappointment are a part of life, and we desperately need to find ways to cope. I and so many others affirm that knowing God intimately and personally, through Jesus the Messiah, is not only true—it will transform you!

I was searching and quietly suffering when I read the following for the very first time. Growing up in a Jewish home, we did not read the New Testament, of course! Jesus said,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

These words were so comforting, although at first, I did not even know who said them! I hope and pray you will discover what the Messiah promised to be true for you as well.



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Suffering and the Existence of God

PART ONE: OUR HUMAN OUTCRY

As Ellis watched the police car enter his driveway, he braced himself for the bad news. The officer handed Ellis the driver's license of his seventeen-year-old daughter, Heather, and then delivered the tragic news that she had just died in a fatal car crash. (Read more about Ellis' story on page six.)

"When Heather died, I questioned God's love for a long time," Ellis recalled.

Years later, Ellis' wife began suffering from Lou Gehrig's Disease, and she eventually succumbed to it. Ellis remembers crying out, "God, you have taken away my entire family!"

He admitted that the loneliness he felt was beyond description. However, his experience in losing his wife was different compared to the loss of his daughter. This time, he found strength in knowing that his wife and his daughter were in heaven because of their faith in Yeshua the Messiah. In the midst of his loneliness, Ellis began to experience the presence of God.

"I saw God's grace and His mercy in a way that I had not expected," he declared.

Ellis Goldstein experienced a time of intense pain and suffering, but he emerged from his loss with his faith intact and thriving. However, some people have difficulty relating to Ellis' faith-filled response to pain and suffering in the world. Some might say the evil in the world is too overwhelming and too purposeless to make belief in God reasonable.

The experience of suffering is a universal human condition. Each of us experiences it to one extent or another. We see it all around us: the horrors of war, natural disasters, sicknesses, and death. The

PART TWO: THE QUEST FOR MEANING & THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

A life with no God and no meaning—some of the best and most brilliant people have tried to live with that viewpoint—and failed.

But the question is, to what will we turn for meaning and why? If faith is needed to believe in either the Bible and the reality of God or the theories of philosophers and world religions, then why choose one over the other? Either way, we are still left standing at the precipice, searching for something to hold on to that gives meaning to our suffering and pain. Why should we simply dismiss the Bible or faith in a personal God? Are the alternatives so attractive?

Ironically, our identification of suffering as disruptive to nature and reality, or just evil, reflects our understanding and hope that something greater and good exists. We know that suffering and evil are real whether we ourselves are affected or not. Something in us revolts against them and drives us to do something to help.

The existence of good is to be expected if a good God exists who created a universe designed to reflect His goodness. A perfect God of harmony and order would also want His creation to live in peace. This is exactly the way the Hebrew Scriptures describe God's design of the universe. After He created everything (time, matter, energy, immaterial realities) out of nothing, He declared it was "very good"—*tov me'od*

(Genesis 1:31). This accounts for the splendor of a serene forest and the intricate functioning of the human body.

What it does not account for is the pain and injustice inherent in our world. We can no longer call the universe *tov me'od*. It may have been good after God first created the cosmos, but something seems to have gone wrong.

Beauty and Ashes

Our world is like a beautiful masterpiece on canvas that has been ripped with scratching fingernails; looking at it now, it is simultaneously a masterpiece and a tragic mess. What is the reason for the intensifying wars, natural disasters, disease, and poverty we live with and hear about every day, not to mention our personal troubles and heartaches? When we ask the question, "Why is there suffering in the world?" we are really asking, "What went wrong?" There is so much beauty and good in our world that it is hard to explain how there can also be so much pain. Is there a reason? A solution? Is there a way to understand how such good and beauty and suffering can coexist?

A Solution to the Question of Suffering

Even if the Bible has never been a consideration before, let us consider for a moment that the Scriptures may be a good place

tragedies of life force us back to the age-old question: Why is there suffering and how could there be a God who allows it?

Suffering in the World

From the ancient Greeks to the great philosophers of the Jewish and Christian traditions, and even within the Bible, humanity has sought the meaning of suffering in light of the existence of God. In the modern age, we have been told that the universe is a mechanical, cold, empty place that merely consists of “particles and progress,” a phrase used by the University of Southern California philosophy professor Dallas Willard. The world simply has no meaning beyond its own bewildering existence.

But Jewish philosopher Mortimer Adler once responded,

The world is a cosmos, not a chaos. The universe has some order. Even those who doubt the perfection of its order, or who point out how it is marred by evil and irrationality, affirm an order or structure, according to which the universe hangs together and is in some degree intelligible to man.¹

A reasonable and consistent view of the world should account for both the presence of suffering and the reality of ultimate good and beauty. We need to discern between two questions: Is the world innately impersonal and imperfect with

suffering simply part of the whole picture? Or, is suffering a blot on a once-perfect creation—a symptom of something that somehow went horribly wrong? If the latter question is correct, we are faced with the following questions: What went wrong? Is there possibly more to the story that gives some type of meaning to suffering, failure, war, poverty, disease, and death?

A cold and chaotic universe with no God to give it order and meaning can never answer the questions about suffering that are also part of our existence. If it is all just about “particles and progress,” then why are we wired to seek and search out meaning that does not exist, that *should not* exist? Why are we striving to better our lives through justice, policies, and spirituality if every supposed experience of goodness results in meaninglessness at worst and happenstance at best?

What do you think? Is this the worldview you are willing to sign on to? Or is it possible that there is something more?

¹ Mortimer J. Adler, ed., *The Syntopicon: An Index to the Great Ideas, Second Edition*, vol. 2, Great Books of the Western World (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1990), 888.

to look. Surely, it is hard to deny that the Bible takes its place among the great treasure troves of wisdom for the ages. We can at least ask, “What can we learn from the biblical stories about suffering and how to find joy and happiness in this life?”

The Scriptures aver that the reason for the universe’s decay goes back to a bad decision the first human beings (yes...Adam and Eve!) made to break the good and moral order God created (Genesis 3). When finite human beings turned their back on the infinite God who made them, it brought about a rupture to the universe that continues to wreak havoc today—unleashing evil, suffering, and injustice.

God could have chosen to leave us alone in our suffering. However, a good, loving, and all-powerful God simply chose not to let us go our own way.

Indeed, God offered to repair what was broken. The story of the people of Israel, as recorded in the Bible, is the story of the divine Artist’s efforts to restore the world. The story begins with our father Abraham, continues through Moses and the prophets, and culminates in the coming of the Messiah, whom God appointed to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4) through His suffering and death. Ultimately, the power of the Messiah will do away with all



the evils of the universe, fully repairing the world.

He became human to join us in our sufferings and to experience first-hand what it means to be alone, to suffer the pains and disappointments of this life and even the judgment for sin while hanging upon a tree outside of Jerusalem.

We still experience tears today as we live in an imperfect universe. Even so, there is hope. We already heard it from Ellis’ experience: In the depths of his greatest loss, he experienced the comfort of God’s grace and mercy. That is what our Creator can do for us through Yeshua the Messiah: He satisfies weary souls, comforts the brokenhearted, and grants mercy and forgiveness to those who have been hurt and even those who hurt others. Because He Himself has suffered unjustly, He sympathizes with us and is willing and able to carry us through our grief. Suffering is not a reason to turn away from Him; no, it is the very opposite. What the Jewish prophet Isaiah wrote hundreds of years ago is still true. Ellis understood this, and so can you!

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power” (Isaiah 40:28).

Fully Alive in the Midst of Suffering

ELLIS RECENTLY FOUND JOY
AGAIN WHEN HE MARRIED
HIS NEW BRIDE, KAREN.



I grew up in a traditional Jewish home. All our grandparents had immigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia, and my parents were a blue-collar family. In most of the Jewish families at that time, boys went to Hebrew school, so that is what I did. I was excited about learning to read Hebrew and learn some new things about the Jewish people. As time went on, the classes began to focus on Bar Mitzvah preparation. But no one ever—neither my parents nor my rabbi—sat down with me to tell me the purpose and the meaning of the Bar Mitzvah. There was no understanding of a relationship with God. It was just learning the rituals, learning Hebrew, but no connection with God at all. But I had been looking for something that would give me some meaning and purpose in life.

I graduated from high school and went off to Penn State. For the next five months, I met off and on with one of the men on campus, and he began to go through portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. We looked at these passages that were supposed to be about the Messiah, but I did not understand their importance; it just did not make any sense to me. So, maybe Jesus rose from the dead, but it meant nothing to me. Well, I was invited to another meeting on campus, and it was as if a veil was lifted. All of a sudden, I understood that Jesus was my Messiah, and at that moment, I embraced Him. I knew that I had to trust Him as my Messiah.

I was reading about the one that I had come to know. At my Bar Mitzvah, I did not have that personal relationship with God, but reading God's word after having met Jesus as

my Messiah, all of a sudden, the Bible came alive. The Bible just becomes God's personal letter to you. It just changes everything.

My wife, Colleen, and I had only one child, Heather. It was a joy watching Heather grow. Faith was so important to our family that we taught it to Heather too. When Heather was two-and-a-half years old, she began to understand what it meant to have to trust Jesus as her Savior. She made a decision to trust Jesus as her Messiah and asked Him to come into her heart. Heather grew up, and she was a delightful child. In school, she was near the top of her class. In her teenage years, she was the person in class that her friends would come to for advice.

On January 19, 1994, we received a call about a blue car that had been in an accident. Heather had a blue car. I called Heather's school, and they told me that she had missed her first two classes. At that point, I was extremely upset. I went into the garage and hit the garage door opener. When the garage door had opened only a few feet, I saw a police car pull into the driveway. It was the state police. The officer handed Heather's driver's license to me, saying my daughter had been in a fatal car crash. Heather was only seventeen-and-a-half years old. That tragic day changed our lives forever.

Several years ago, Colleen began having problems with her throat. After visiting a couple of ENTs (ear, nose, and throat doctors) and then a neurologist, Colleen was told that she



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had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. The disease continued to deteriorate to the point where Colleen was no longer able to speak. She was getting weaker, and it was beginning to affect her other muscles until she was no longer able to write. Toward the end, she was suffering tremendously, and she told me that she just wanted to be with the Lord.

One Sunday, Colleen was having trouble with her breathing. A nurse from hospice came over the next day, and she said that it might be best for Colleen to go into the hospice home. I asked, "When would I be able to take her home?" The doctor said, "She won't be leaving here." It was about 3:30 in the morning, and two nurses came in and woke me, saying that Colleen was gone. I just stood there, frozen. My wife has passed away. What am I supposed to do?

It was one thing to lose my daughter, but now I had just lost my dear wife. I cried out, "God, You've taken away my entire family!" The loneliness I have felt as a result of losing my family was beyond description. When Heather died, I questioned God's love for a long time. With Colleen's death, I did not question God's love. I knew God loved me, and that He loved Colleen—and still does. Colleen had said right after Heather had died that, because Heather had trusted Jesus as her Messiah, she was absolutely in the presence of God, because she placed her trust in Him as her personal savior.

When the Lord took Colleen, I knew that in one instant, she was in this failing human body, and in the next instant, she was with the Lord. I saw God's grace and His mercy in a way that I had not expected. I did not know what it would look like, and then, I realized, this is what it looks like. God showed His love that way. Colleen and Heather are fully alive with Him. You see, when you come to believe in Jesus as your Messiah, it is not just about what is taking place here on earth. For those who believe that He is who He claimed to be, it means that there is eternal life.

What if Jesus Is the Jewish Messiah?

You might be ready for the next step—to acknowledge Yeshua (Jesus) as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Here are some simple steps to take as you continue your journey.

We would love to help you discover how Yeshua can transform your life—so please do not hesitate to contact us! Email ask@chosenpeople.com or call 212-223-2252.

REPENT – God is holy and we are not! We frequently behave in ways that separate us from Him, and we need His forgiveness. The Hebrew Scriptures say, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1–2). Recognizing our sin is the first major step toward an intimate and personal relationship with the Lord.

BELIEVE – We cannot earn God’s forgiveness through good works or keeping the *mitzvot*. The Torah says about Abraham, “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). The New Covenant Scriptures say, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23). Personal salvation is a gift from God that we accept by faith.

ACCEPT YESHUA – The great Rabbi Saul, writing in the New Covenant Scriptures, tells us what we should believe to receive the gift of personal salvation: “That Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). If Yeshua is both divine and the rightful king of Israel, then He deserves our full allegiance.

PRAY – Prayer is a personal conversation with God—heart to heart. You can pray in this way: “God, you are righteous and I am not. I have disobeyed your commandments. I believe Yeshua is my Messiah. His death and resurrection are my only hope. Please forgive me and give me a new life with you.” And God will answer, as we read in the New Covenant Scriptures, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

For more information and to request a free copy of the book, *Isaiah 53 Explained*, please visit Isaiah53.com. To view video testimonies of Jewish people who believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, visit ifoundshalom.com.

