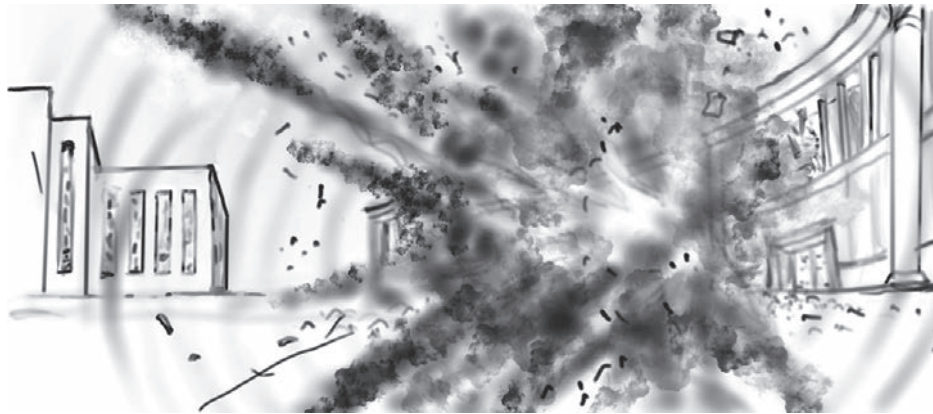


The Problem With Evil



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 94:3; Job 38:1–12; Psalm 73; Genesis 2:16, 17; Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:3, 4.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. No one will die. No one will ever cry or be sad for any reason. No one will ever have trouble. The old things are gone’ ” (Revelation 21:4, WE).

MAYBE THE BIGGEST PROBLEM for Christians is the problem with evil. If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil?

This question troubles many people and keeps some of them from coming to know and love God.

“Many people are troubled with the problem of sin. How did sin start? Why is sin on this earth? People see the evil in life and that it is very terrible. So, some people question how a loving, powerful, and wise God can allow there to be evil. People can find no explanation for this mystery.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 492, adapted.

Many people say the reason they don't believe in God is because of the problem with evil. But as we will see this week and in coming weeks, the God of the Bible is holy and fair. We can trust Him, even when evil is everywhere around us.



“Some people question how a loving, powerful, and wise God can allow there to be evil.”

“LORD, HOW LONG?” (Psalm 94:3)

The problem with evil is more than a problem we have today. Bible writers talked about the problem in their day, too.

Read Job 30:26; Jeremiah 12:1; Jeremiah 13:22; Malachi 2:17; and Psalm 10:1. What do these verses say about the problem with evil? How much is this problem a part of the human experience?

These verses ask many questions that we continue to ask and seek answers for today. Why do people who do evil seem as if they enjoy a lot of success, if not always but often enough? Why do God’s loyal followers suffer so much? Why does God sometimes seem to be so far away from us, or hidden?

Whatever we say about these questions, we must not think that the problem with evil is small or not important. Evil is very bad. God hates evil more than we do. So, we may join the Bible writers who cry out to God against the many evils in life: “LORD, how long will the wicked have their fun? How much longer?” (Psalm 94:3, ERV).

Read Matthew 27:46. How do you understand Jesus’ words in this verse? How do His words help us understand that evil hurts God, too, in the most painful way?

On the cross, Jesus asked the question, “ ‘My God, my God, why have you left me alone?’ ” (Matthew 27:46, ERV). In this verse, we see that evil hurt God. This amazing Bible truth is shown in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. All the evil on this earth fell on Jesus at that time.

This verse also gives us hope. On the cross, Jesus won the fight against evil and its cause, Satan. In the future, Jesus will end evil forever. The words Jesus said on the cross are a quote from Psalm 22:1. The rest of the psalm ends in success and with praises to God.

On the cross, Jesus looked for a hope that He didn’t see at the time. How does Jesus’ experience on the cross give us hope when we, too, feel hopeless?

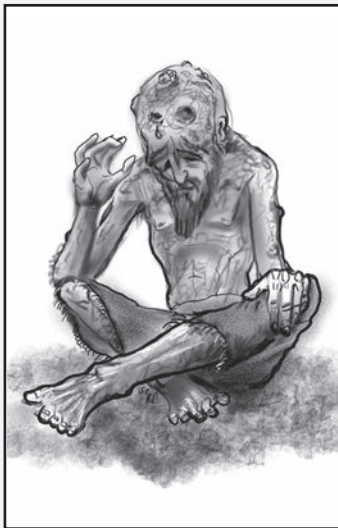


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WE DON'T KNOW SO MANY THINGS (Job 38:1–12)

History will end when God's love wins the fight against evil. But meanwhile, many questions about evil may continue to trouble us. How can we think and talk about the problem with evil in a way that is helpful?

Read Job 38:1–12. How does God's answer to Job help us to understand the bad things that happen? How much do we know about the bad things that are happening now? How much do we not understand?



We also should be the same as Job. We should empty our hearts of all pride and understand that many things are happening in life that we can't see and don't know anything about.

Job suffered much. He asked many questions about why so much evil and suffering happened to him. Job wanted to talk with God to get answers to his questions. Job didn't understand that far more was happening in heaven than he could see (read Job 1; 2). One Bible translation writes: " 'Why do you talk so much when you know so little?' " (Job 38:2, CEV). After God asks Job this question, God says in Job 38:4, " 'Where were you when I made the earth? If you are so smart, answer me' " (ERV).

Read Job 42:3. How does Job's answer help us to know what we should understand about ourselves?

God's answer to Job shows that Job didn't know and understand many things. We also should be the same as Job. We should empty our hearts of all pride and understand that many things are happening in life that we can't see and don't know anything about. We may not know the answers to all our questions. But that doesn't mean that there are no good answers. We must believe that God will answer our questions in the future. Until then, we must trust in God.

Think about how little we know about anything. Why, then, should we accept that there are questions that we can't answer now about evil and suffering?

GOD HAS REASONS WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT (Psalm 73)

God announces in Isaiah 55:8, 9, “ ‘The LORD says, “My thoughts are not like [the same as] yours. Your ways are not like mine. Just as the heavens are higher than [above] the earth, so my ways are higher [filled with more wisdom] than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts’ ” (ERV).

Our thoughts are not as wise as God’s thoughts. We can’t imagine in our minds God’s whole plan for history. So, why should we expect to know what God’s reasons are for what He does or doesn’t do?

So, then, how can we, as humans, understand the problem with evil? Some people believe in something named skeptical theism. It means that God has good reasons for doing the things He does, even if we don’t always understand them. At the same time, our knowledge about God is limited. So, we shouldn’t expect to know just what His reasons are. A skeptical theist is someone who believes this way. The skeptical theist doubts that humans can understand fully God’s reasons for doing what He does or His decisions about evil on this earth. We can’t see germs moving around in the air. But that doesn’t mean germs aren’t moving in the air all around us. In the same way, we may not know what God’s reasons are, but that doesn’t mean God has no good reasons.

Read Psalm 73. What does the poet who wrote Psalm 73 think and feel about the evil around him? What does the poet see that helps him to understand things in a new way?

The poet was very troubled when he saw all the evil in life. The poet looked around him and saw evil people enjoying success. Nothing was fair. The poet had no answers for what he saw. He wondered if his believing and serving God was worth it. But then the poet looked in God’s holy temple.

God’s temple helped the poet understand the problem with evil better. How? The temple is the place where God does His work as Judge. As a holy Judge, God will do what is fair. He will punish evil in His own time.



God’s temple helped the poet understand the problem with evil better.

FREE TO CHOOSE (Genesis 2:16, 17)



The story about the Fall shows how the wrong choice brought sin and evil into the history of our planet.

While we may not fully understand God's ways or thoughts, the Bible does tell us some things that help us with the problem of evil. One view for helping us understand the problem with evil better is named the free will defense.

The free will defense is the view that evil happened because humans made the wrong choice. So, we must not blame God for evil. God gave us free will or free choice for good reasons. Why did God make us free to choose? Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote, "Free choice makes evil possible. At the same time, free choice is the only thing that makes possible any love or joy worth having. A planet filled with robots is not worth making. God wants us to be happy. The only way we can be happy is to love God and each other. . . . We can love God and each other only if we are free."—*Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), page 52, adapted.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17. What do these verses teach us about the freedom to choose?

Why would God bother to command Adam and Eve to obey if they weren't free to obey? Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit. Since then, our planet became filled with evil. In Genesis 4, the next chapter after the story about the Fall, we read about Cain killing his brother Abel. The story about the Fall shows how the wrong choice brought sin and evil into the history of our planet.

All through the Bible, we read about free choice. (Read Deuteronomy 7:12, 13; Joshua 24:14, 15; Psalm 81:11–14; and Isaiah 66:4.) Every day of our lives, we make choices because God made us free to choose. Without the freedom to choose, we would not really be human. We would be more like a machine or a robot.

Sony Company made a robot dog, named Aibo. But Aibo can't get sick, can't get fleas, won't bite, doesn't need shots or medicine, and doesn't lose its fur. Would you trade your real dog for an Aibo? If no, how does your choice help you better understand why God made us free to choose?

LOVE AND EVIL (Romans 8:18)

God gave people free choice. Free choice is necessary for love. When we make bad choices, evil happens. Why does God allow evil to happen? God hates evil. But He allows evil to happen for a time. We must be free to choose evil or good. Without this choice, we cannot be free to love. If God destroyed evil too soon, people would serve God because of fear, and not because they loved Him.

“The people on the earth didn’t understand God. So, the earth was a dark place. God wanted people to understand who He really was. He wanted to end Satan’s lies. God wanted to bring people back to Himself. God couldn’t force people to accept Him. That goes against the important rules of God’s government. God wants people to serve Him because they love Him. Love can’t be commanded. Love can’t be won with control. We love God because God first loved us. When we know God, we will love Him back. God’s love must be shown to everyone on earth. Then people can compare God’s love for them with Satan’s plans to destroy them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.

If we aren’t free to choose, we can’t be free to love. If God is love, then God must allow us the freedom to choose to love Him.

Read Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:3, 4. For sure, there is so much evil in this life. Even so, how can these verses help us to trust in God’s love and mercy?

Often, we can’t understand why evil happens. But God sees the end from the beginning. He also promises happiness to everyone who has faith in Jesus. Romans 8:18 tells us, “Now I’m sure of this [amazing promise]: the sufferings we endure [have] now are not even [at all] worth comparing to the glory that is coming and will be revealed [shown] in us” (VOICE). Do we have the faith and trust to believe this amazing promise?

Jesus chose to die because He wanted us to be free to love. He knew what our freedom to choose would cost Him. Our free choice would send Him to the cross and cause Him to suffer much. But Jesus gave us our freedom anyway. Why must we always remember this important Bible truth?



**Jesus knew
what our freedom
to choose
would cost Him.**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Why Was Sin Permitted?” pages 33–43, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God threw Satan out of heaven. But even then, God was very wise. He didn’t destroy Satan. God only accepts people who serve Him in love. God’s followers must believe He is fair and filled with mercy. The angels in heaven and the people on other planets weren’t ready to understand sin and the evil it would cause. So, they weren’t ready to understand that Satan should be destroyed. If God destroyed Satan right away, some people would serve God from fear and not love. Then Satan’s evil would not be fully destroyed. The spirit of fighting against God would continue. So, God did the best thing for everyone. God allowed Satan to show the rules of his kingdom. Then people would more fully understand the truth about Satan’s lies against God’s government. Then people would see that God was fair and filled with mercy. No one would doubt God or His law again.

“Satan’s war against God is a lesson to everyone in heaven and on earth. Satan’s war teaches us about the terrible things that happen when we break God’s law. We see what happens when people follow Satan. We see what sin does to both angels and people who refuse to obey God. We also see that God’s government wants what is best for everything He made. Sin is a terrible experiment. The history of sin will help the people on other planets to understand that sin is very evil and help them not to sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 42, 43, adapted.



God threw Satan out of heaven.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God gives us the freedom to choose. How does our freedom to choose help protect us from thinking that everything that happens is God’s plan?
- ② Do you sometimes feel the same way as Job? Too many bad things happen at the same time. Do you sometimes think that there can’t really be a good explanation for the pain or hurt that you or your loved ones suffered? Job says, “ ‘I talked about things I did not understand’ ” (Job 42:3, ERV). How does this verse help you understand how limited we are in our understanding of God and His plans?

A VOICE IN THE DARK

An angry voice woke up Grace Babcock in the middle of the night. The voice said, “You don’t know. You don’t understand.”

Grace was upset about being woken up, but she wasn’t scared. Grace worked as a teacher at the Holbrook Indian School.

The voice told Grace, “God is controlling you the same as a puppet. You don’t understand many things. You follow God blindly. God is not fair.”

Grace was trying to trust God after a bus hit and killed a student. Grace had many questions for God. But she was feeling upset about the student’s death. So, she didn’t want to talk with God about her questions.

Now the voice was accusing God, and Grace didn’t like that. Grace said, “Go away. I don’t want to talk to you.”

The voice stopped talking.

But Grace remembered the bad things the voice said against God. Grace didn’t want to talk to God right now. But she felt she needed to be fair. So, Grace asked God about the things that the voice said. But God said nothing. So, Grace fell asleep.

The next day, Grace went to a spot in nature where she often liked to think. She sat down on a rock. Then she asked God again about the things that the voice said against Him. God stayed silent. Grace went home just before night came.

Grace went to the same place the next day. Again, God was silent when she asked Him her questions. But as she walked home, she heard a voice in her heart say, “You don’t need to know the answers to these questions. You need to trust and believe.”

Grace said, “That’s true. I don’t need to know the answers. But I do need to know that You are loving and holy, Lord. Right now, I don’t know if You are loving and holy.”

Back home in her one-bedroom apartment, Grace opened the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and started to read. As she read, she heard a voice in her heart say, “Look up.”

When Grace looked up, she saw a picture from a coloring book on her refrigerator. A fifth-grade student gave the picture to Grace. The picture showed Jesus’ cross with the words from John 3:16. Grace said, “You died for us, Jesus. Because You did that, You really are loving. I can trust You, even if I don’t have answers to all my questions.”

Grace Babcock teaches at the Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Your 13th Sabbath Offering helped support this school, in 2021. Thank you for continuing to support the Good News about Jesus with this quarter’s 13th Sabbath Offering.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



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Grace Babcock