

## MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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*A Study for Judaism · Christianity · Islam*

### DOCUMENT 145

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

### A COVENANT DEEP DIVE INTO THEODICY

*Why Does Yahweh Allow Evil and Suffering? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response*

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☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
<p><b>Iyov (Job) is the Tanakh's primary theodicy text.</b> Yahweh vindicates Iyov, not his friends. The covenant never promises exemption from suffering — it promises Yahweh's presence through it.</p>	<p><b>Christianity imports Greek philosophical categories</b> (omnipotence, omnibenevolence) that reframe the question. The Tanakh does not use these terms. The covenant answer is not philosophical — it is relational.</p>	<p><b>Islam addresses al-balaa (البلاء) — trial and affliction — as divine testing.</b> The Quran (2:286) states Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Both Islam and the Tanakh frame suffering relationally, not philosophically.</p>

### DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

**The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of Yahweh. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and theological comparison only. The Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.**

### HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh*. **Yahweh (יהוה)** and **Elohim (אֱלֹהִים)** appear in bold throughout. Hebrew book names are given with English in parentheses. Hebrew transliterations appear in *bold italic* with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

### TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
<b>Torah</b>	Bereishit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayikra (Leviticus), Bemidbar (Numbers), Devarim (Deuteronomy)	Foundation text — covenant framework and origins of human agency
<b>Nevi'im</b>	Yeshayahu (Isaiah), Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah), Amos, Habakkuk, Yechezkel (Ezekiel)	Prophetic witness to Yahweh's sovereignty and covenant justice
<b>Ketuvim</b>	Iyov (Job), Tehillim (Psalms), Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), Mishlei (Proverbs), Eicha (Lamentations)	Wisdom and lament literature — the covenant community's engagement with suffering

## PART I: FRAMING THE QUESTION — WHAT THE COVENANT ACTUALLY ASKS

### IA — THE PROBLEM AS PHILOSOPHERS FRAME IT

The classical statement of the Problem of Evil — known in philosophy and theology as *theodicy* (from Greek *theos*, "god," and *dike*, "justice") — poses three claims that appear mutually contradictory: (1) **Yahweh** is all-powerful (omnipotent); (2) **Yahweh** is all-knowing (omniscient); (3) **Yahweh** is entirely good (omnibenevolent). If all three are true, then why does evil exist? The philosopher David Hume sharpened this into a syllogism: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Where then is evil?"

This formulation sounds devastating. But it contains a foundational error that the Tanakh exposes at its root: it imports **Greek philosophical categories** — omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience — and *assumes* the Hebrew covenant must answer on those terms. It does not. The Tanakh was never written to produce a philosophical proof. It was written to establish a **covenant** — a binding relational agreement between **Yahweh** and Yisra'el (Israel), with legal consequences, moral obligations, and a clearly defined framework of blessing and discipline.

The covenant question is not: "*If God is omnibenevolent, why does evil exist?*" The covenant question is: "**Yahweh has set before you life and death, blessing and cursing (Devarim [Deuteronomy] 30:19) — which did you choose, and why are you surprised by the consequences?**"

### IB — THE HEBREW VOCABULARY OF EVIL: RA (רָע)

The foundational Hebrew word for "evil" is *ra* (רָע), Strong's **H7451**. According to the **BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs) Hebrew Lexicon**, *ra* (רָע) spans a wide semantic range: (1) *moral evil / wickedness* — the quality of acts that violate covenant instruction; (2) *physical calamity / disaster / adversity* — hardship that befalls a person or nation; (3) *displeasing / harmful* — that which is wrong in effect rather than merely in moral quality. The word appears over 660 times in Tanakh. This breadth is critical: when the Tanakh speaks of "evil," it is not always speaking of moral wickedness. Context determines meaning.

The pivotal text is **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 45:7** — one of the most misread verses in the entire Tanakh:

**"I form the light and create darkness; I make *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם) [peace / wholeness] and create *ra* (רָע) [calamity / adversity]; I, Yahweh, do all these things."** (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 45:7, JPS 1985)

The same verb *bara* (בָּרָא) — H1254 — used in **Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1** for creation appears here. **Yahweh** is not merely "allowing" calamity — He is the sovereign over it. Crucially, this verse is addressed to Cyrus of Persia to refute Persian dualist theology (Zoroastrianism) which held that light/good and dark/evil were co-equal divine powers. **Yahweh's response: I am sovereign over both.** This is not a confession that **Yahweh** authorizes moral wickedness — it is a declaration that no rival divine power governs calamity, judgment, or adversity. **Yahweh** alone rules the full range of human and cosmic experience.

## PART II: THE COVENANT FRAMEWORK — DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 30:15–19

### II.A — THE COVENANT SETS THE TERMS BEFORE THE CONSEQUENCES

Before any theodicy can be properly evaluated, the covenant's own terms must be heard. The Tanakh does not describe a world where evil is a mystery — it describes a world where **Yahweh** lays out the full consequences of human choice in advance and calls witnesses:

**"See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today — I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.**

**Therefore choose life, so that you and your offspring may live."** (Devarim [Deuteronomy] 30:15, 19 — JPS 1985)

The Hebrew structure of **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19** pairs *chayyim* (חַיִּים) [life] with *tov* (טוֹב) [good], and *mavet* (מוֹת) [death] with *ra* (רָע) [evil/calamity]. These are not metaphysical categories — they are **covenant outcomes**. Life and good flow from walking in **Yahweh's** instruction. Death and evil are the consequences of departure from it. The covenant is a binding legal agreement with stated terms — not a cosmic mystery to be puzzled over.

### II.B — THE TWO-INCLINATION FRAMEWORK: BEREISHIT (GENESIS) 6:5 AND 8:21

The Tanakh does not teach that humans are neutral moral agents. From the earliest covenant records, **Yahweh** diagnoses the human condition with precision. **Bereishit (Genesis) 6:5** declares:

**"Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every *yetzer* (יֵצֶר) [inclination / device / purpose] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil (*ra*) continually." (Bereishit [Genesis] 6:5)**

The Hebrew *yetzer* (יֵצֶר) — **H3336** — from the root *yatzar* (יָצַר, to form or fashion) — refers to the formative drive or creative impulse within a person. BDB glosses it as "of what is framed in the mind, imagination, device, purpose." Repeated in **Bereishit (Genesis) 8:21** after the flood, this diagnosis is not erased by the covenant with Noah (Noah) — it is acknowledged: "**for the *yetzer* of man's heart is evil from his youth.**" The covenant does not pretend humans have no evil inclination. It confronts it, names it, and provides instruction — *Torah* (תּוֹרָה) — as the means by which the *yetzer ha-tov* (יֵצֶר הַטוֹב, the good inclination) is cultivated. Free will is not optional philosophy in the Tanakh — it is the operating assumption of every covenant obligation.

## II.C — BECHIRAH (בְּחִירָה): THE FOUNDATION OF COVENANT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Hebrew word *bechirah* (בְּחִירָה, free choice) from the root *bachar* (בָּחַר, to choose, elect) — **H977** — runs through the covenant like a spine. **Yahweh** chooses Yisra'el (Israel); Yisra'el (Israel) chooses whether to walk in the covenant. The word appears most powerfully in **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19**: "**Therefore *u-vacharta ba-chayyim* (וּבַחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים) — choose life.**" This is not a suggestion; it is a command. The fact that it must be commanded reveals that the alternate choice — death and evil — is genuinely available. A world without the capacity for genuine evil is a world without genuine choice. A world without genuine choice is a world without covenant.

**The Problem of Evil, properly understood from the Tanakh, resolves into this: Yahweh created beings with genuine moral agency. Genuine moral agency requires genuine moral consequences. To eliminate suffering and evil from the world would be to eliminate human freedom from the covenant. The covenant would become performance art — a theater of pretend choices with no weight. Yahweh refused that arrangement. He created real beings capable of real failure and real faithfulness, and He embedded the consequences of both in the covenant structure He gave them.**

## PART III: IYOV (JOB) — THE TANAKH'S PRIMARY THEODICY TEXT

### III.A — THE SETUP: HA-SATAN (הַשָּׂטָן) AS COVENANT ACCUSER

The Book of **Iyov (Job)** is Tanakh's most direct and sustained engagement with the theodicy problem. It is critical to read it on its own terms, not through later theological overlays. The figure called **ba-Satan** (בַּשָּׂטָן) in **Iyov (Job) 1–2** is *not* the Christian or Islamic "Devil" — he is a **ben Elohim** (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, a member of the divine council) fulfilling the role of **satan** (שָׂטָן) — **H7854** — the prosecuting adversary or accuser in a legal assembly. The word means "one who opposes" or "adversary." This is a legal proceeding, not a cosmic war.

Ha-Satan's accusation is precise: "**Does Iyov fear Elohim for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him? But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.**" (**Iyov [Job] 1:9–11**) The accusation is that Iyov's covenant faithfulness is transactional — purchased by blessing, not genuine. **Yahweh** accepts the test. This is the critical move: the suffering of Iyov (Job) is not punishment. It is not the result of his sin. It is the vehicle by which his genuine covenant faithfulness is demonstrated to be real. The theodicy of Iyov (Job) inverts the retributive assumption entirely.

### III.B — THE FRIENDS' ERROR: MISAPPLYING THE COVENANT

Iyov's (Job's) three friends — **Eliphaz, Bildad, and Tzofar (Zophar)** — represent the most persistent and dangerous theological error in the history of religion: the assumption that suffering is always a consequence of the sufferer's sin. Their argument: **Yahweh** is just; Iyov suffers; therefore Iyov has sinned. This is clean, simple, and catastrophically wrong. **Yahweh's** own verdict in **Iyov (Job) 42:7** is unambiguous: "**You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Iyov has.**" The friends, not Iyov, are rebuked. They must bring a burnt offering and have Iyov intercede for them.

The Tanakh explicitly forbids the conclusion that *all* suffering is caused by the sufferer's sin. This prohibition is already embedded in Tanakh law. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** — the two-or-three-witness standard — governs accusations against persons. You may not condemn a person's standing on the basis of their suffering alone. Suffering is not testimony against the sufferer.

### III.C — YAHWEH SPEAKS FROM THE WHIRLWIND

When **Yahweh** finally answers Iyov (Job) in chapters 38–41, the answer is not a philosophical explanation. It is a covenant encounter. **Yahweh** does not explain theodicy — He reveals His own unfathomable governance of the cosmos:

**"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements — surely you know!" (Iyov [Job] 38:4–5)**

This is not a silencing of Iyov's question through power. It is a *recalibration of the frame of reference*. The problem of evil assumes that a human being standing within a single lifetime, in one location, with finite perception can fully evaluate the justice of **Yahweh's** governance of a cosmos He created, sustains, and will redeem. **Yahweh** refuses to let that assumption stand. The covenant answer to theodicy is not "I will explain suffering to you" — it is "**I am Yahweh, and I will be with you in it.**" **Iyov (Job) 42:5: "My ear had heard of You, but now my eye sees You."** Iyov (Job) does not receive an explanation. He receives **Yahweh** Himself. That is the covenant answer.

## **PART IV: FIVE COVENANT WITNESSES TO SUFFERING AND SOVEREIGNTY**

Per the **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. The following five witnesses corroborate the covenant framework of suffering, sovereignty, and restoration.

### **WITNESS ONE — AMOS 3:6: DOES EVIL COME TO A CITY UNLESS YAHWEH HAS DONE IT?**

**"Does a trumpet sound in a city and the people are not alarmed? Does evil (*ra, ער*) befall a city unless Yahweh has done it?" (Amos 3:6 — JPS 1985)**

The prophet **Amos** states with rhetorical precision that calamity does not arrive outside **Yahweh's** sovereign governance. This is not fatalism — it is covenant monotheism. No rival force, no autonomous evil power, controls the fate of nations. **Yahweh's** sovereign permission is required for calamity to operate. The same passage (**Amos 3:1–8**) frames this as prophetic warning: calamity is the instrument of covenant accountability, not cosmic accident.

### **WITNESS TWO — HABAKKUK 1–3: THE COVENANT COMMUNITY IN PROTEST**

**"O Yahweh, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen? Or cry to You 'Violence!' and You will not save? Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong?" (Habakkuk 1:2–3)**

The prophet **Habakkuk** does not construct a philosophical argument against **Yahweh's** existence. He *brings his protest directly to Yahweh* in the form of covenant lament. The Tanakh *institutionalizes* the community's right to cry out, to protest, to demand an answer from **Yahweh** — while never

surrendering covenant loyalty. **Habakkuk 3:17–18** is the covenant declaration of trust in the absence of material evidence:

**"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls — yet I will rejoice in Yahweh; I will take joy in the Elohim of my salvation."** (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

This is covenant faithfulness not in spite of suffering but *through* it — not because suffering is good, but because **Yahweh's** covenant faithfulness transcends the present condition.

### **WITNESS THREE — EICHA (LAMENTATIONS): THE COMMUNITY MOURNS COVENANT DISCIPLINE**

The Book of **Eicha (Lamentations)** is Israel's response to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) and the Temple. It is the Tanakh's most raw and unfiltered engagement with national catastrophic suffering. Crucially, it does not attribute the destruction to any rival deity or to chaos — it attributes it directly to **Yahweh's** covenant discipline:

**"Yahweh is in the right, for I have rebelled against His word."** (Eicha [Lamentations] 1:18)

And yet the center of the book — **Eicha (Lamentations) 3:22–23** — pivots to the covenant's deepest affirmation:

**"The *chesed* (חֶסֶד) [covenant-love / steadfast-love] of Yahweh never ceases; His *rachamim* (רַחֲמִים) [mercies] never end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."** (Eicha [Lamentations] 3:22–23)

Suffering does not terminate the covenant. Even covenant discipline does not sever the relationship. ***Chesed* (חֶסֶד)** — the covenant-love that **Yahweh** pledged — endures through the judgment. This is the covenant answer to despair: not that suffering is good, but that **Yahweh's chesed** outlasts it.

### **WITNESS FOUR — YESHAYAHU (ISAIAH) 53: THE SERVANT WHO BEARS THE WEIGHT**

Within the covenant community, **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 53** — the ***Eved Yahweh*** (עֶבֶד יְהוָה, Servant of **Yahweh**) passage — presents a vision of suffering that is neither punishment nor accident, but **covenant witness**:

**"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... and by his wounds we are healed."  
(Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 53:4–5)**

The Tanakh identifies a mode of suffering that is redemptive in its witness function — not because suffering itself is holy, but because the covenant community's endurance under suffering *demonstrates* the reality of covenant faithfulness before the nations. The argument of **Iyov (Job)** and the vision of **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 53** converge: suffering can be the arena in which the genuineness of covenant relationship is revealed. This is the Tanakh's framework — not a theodicy that *explains away* suffering, but one that *assigns it a covenant function* without trivializing it.

### **WITNESS FIVE — KOHELET (ECCLESIASTES): REFUSING EASY ANSWERS**

**"There is a vanity that happens on earth: there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is *hevel* (הֶבֶל) [vanity / vapor / emptiness]." (Kohelet [Ecclesiastes] 8:14)**

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) is the Tanakh's most honest statement of the observable injustice in human experience. The Preacher does not manufacture comfort. He observes that the righteous suffer what the wicked deserve, and the wicked prosper as the righteous should — and he calls this *hevel* (הֶבֶל) — vapor, emptiness, the incomprehensible. But his conclusion (**Kohelet [Ecclesiastes] 12:13–14**) is not despair — it is covenant realism:

**"Fear Elohim and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For Elohim will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." (Kohelet [Ecclesiastes] 12:13–14)**

The Tanakh does not promise that justice will be visible in every generation, in every human lifespan. It asserts that **Yahweh's** judgment is comprehensive, final, and certain — even when it is not yet visible. This is the covenant's answer to the observed injustice in the world: not that it doesn't exist, but that **Yahweh** sees all of it, and His accounting is not yet complete.

## PART V: WHAT WENT WRONG — THE COVENANT RUPTURE IN BEREISHIT (GENESIS) 3

### V.A — THE RUPTURE: HUMANITY'S CHOICE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The account in **Bereishit (Genesis) 3** is not a myth about the origin of evil as a cosmic force — it is a covenant narrative about the first exercise of human *bechirah* (free choice) against **Yahweh's** explicit instruction. The consequences are stated as covenant outcomes: labor becomes toil; childbirth involves pain; the ground itself resists cultivation (**Bereishit [Genesis] 3:17–19**). The earth is not *cursed* in the sense of eternal divine malice — it is placed under *arur* (אָרַר, H779 — under a binding condition of constraint) because of the human covenant rupture. The consequences are structural, not capricious.

The critical observation: **Yahweh** did not create evil in Bereishit (Genesis) 3. The human agents chose to override the single boundary **Yahweh** had given, and the structural consequences of that choice — including the disharmony between humanity, creation, and covenant relationship — followed. The world does not suffer because **Yahweh** is malevolent. It suffers because a covenant was broken, and **Yahweh** is honest enough to let the consequences stand rather than void the freedom He granted.

### V.B — THE NON-DUALIST COVENANT: NO RIVAL EVIL POWER

One of the most important contributions of the Tanakh to this discussion is its explicit **rejection of dualism** — the idea that evil is governed by a power equal to or co-eternal with **Yahweh**. This is the theological context of **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 45:7** (cited above). The text is addressed directly to the Persian Zoroastrian framework of Ahura Mazda (light) vs. Angra Mainyu (darkness) as co-equal divine powers. **Yahweh's** answer is absolute: no such co-equal evil power exists. **Yahweh** alone governs all. This means there is no autonomous "evil force" in the cosmos running loose outside of **Yahweh's** knowledge or control. All adversity, calamity, and judgment operates within **Yahweh's** sovereign authority.

This also means the problem of evil, as philosophers frame it, is built on a premise the Tanakh does not accept. The Tanakh does not say **Yahweh** is "good" in the sense of being maximally pleasant to all persons at all times. It says **Yahweh** is *yashar* (יָשָׁר, upright / straight) and *tzaddik* (צַדִּיק, righteous) — terms of legal covenant standing, not Hellenistic moral philosophy. The Tanakh's **Yahweh** is not a therapist. He is a covenant Sovereign whose governance extends to both blessing and discipline, both light and calamity, and who calls the community to faithfulness through both.

## PART VI: THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION HANDLES THE PROBLEM

The following table examines how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam approach theodicy — what each tradition gets right, where each tradition departs from the Tanakh's covenant framework, and what the covenant witness corrects.

JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
<p><b>Primary Question:</b> Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? (<i>tzaddik ve-ra lo, rasha ve-tov lo</i>)</p>	<p><b>Primary Question:</b> If God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent, why does evil exist? (Greek philosophical frame)</p>	<p><b>Primary Question:</b> Why does Allah, who is just and merciful, permit suffering and evil?</p>
<p><b>Covenant Strength:</b> Refuses to abandon covenant despite suffering. Iyov (Job), Habakkuk, Tehillim (Psalms) all bring protest directly to Yahweh. Tradition of lament is preserved.</p>	<p><b>Covenant Strength:</b> Recognizes suffering as a vehicle for character formation (Hebrews 12). Preserves the narrative of innocent suffering as covenant witness.</p>	<p><b>Covenant Strength:</b> al-balaa (البلاء) — trial / affliction — is a primary Quranic framework. Suffering is a test of faith (Q. 2:155). The concept of sabr (صبر, patient endurance) echoes Habakkuk's covenant faithfulness.</p>
<p><b>Covenant Departure:</b> Retributive theodicy — all suffering as consequence of sin — was condemned by Yahweh Himself in Iyov (Job) 42:7. The rabbinic impulse to 'explain' suffering often re-imports what the Tanakh explicitly rejects.</p>	<p><b>Covenant Departure:</b> Importing Greek philosophical categories (omnipotence, omnibenevolence) forces the Hebrew covenant to answer questions it was never designed to answer on Hellenistic terms. "Original sin" as inherited guilt is not the Tanakh's teaching — it is Augustine's reading of Paul's Greek rendering of a Hebrew covenant text.</p>	<p><b>Covenant Departure:</b> When suffering is reduced entirely to divine test or punishment, the framework parallels exactly what Yahweh condemned in Iyov's (Job's) friends. Not all suffering is direct punishment for sin — the Tanakh is explicit on this.</p>
<p><b>Covenant Witness:</b> The answer is not found in explanation but in encounter.</p>	<p><b>Covenant Witness:</b> Strip the Greek overlay. Return the question to the Tanakh's</p>	<p><b>Covenant Witness:</b> The Quranic principle — "We do not burden a soul beyond its</p>

Iyov (Job) receives Yahweh Himself from the whirlwind — not a theodicy but a covenant presence. The question shifts from "why?" to "who is with me?"	covenant frame: Yahweh set before you life and death. The covenant does not promise immunity from suffering — it promises Yahweh's presence and the possibility of covenant restoration.	capacity" (Q. 2:286) — resonates with the covenant's teaching that Yahweh's discipline is purposive, not capricious. Where Islam and the Tanakh converge: suffering operates within divine sovereignty, not outside it.
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## PART VII: THE FALSE SHEPHERD PROBLEM — HOW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS DEEPEN THE WOUND

A critical dimension of the theodicy problem that academic philosophy consistently overlooks is the role of **false spiritual leadership** in creating and sustaining suffering. **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34** — **Yahweh's** extended indictment of the shepherds of Yisra'el (Israel) — identifies a pattern of institutionally-generated suffering that is inseparable from the theodicy discussion:

**"Woe to the shepherds of Yisra'el who have been feeding themselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep." (Yechezkel [Ezekiel] 34:2–3)**

The suffering that religion attributes to **Yahweh's** inscrutable will is frequently — in the Tanakh's own assessment — the direct consequence of covenant communities led by shepherds who exploit rather than serve. The grief of the flock is not **Yahweh's** design; it is the consequence of human covenant failure in leadership. **Yahweh's** response in **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34:11** is His own commitment:

**"For thus says Yahweh Elohim: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."**

The three religious communities must honestly apply this to themselves: How much of the suffering that is attributed to divine mystery is actually the consequence of institutional exploitation, doctrinal abuse, financial manipulation, and the silencing of legitimate covenant protest? The theodicy problem, applied with covenant integrity, turns on the institutions — not merely on the cosmos.

## PART VIII: SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

#	COVENANT DECLARATION
<b>I</b>	Yahweh is sovereign over both shalom (שלום, peace/wholeness) and ra (עָרָא, calamity). No rival power operates outside His authority. Evil is not a co-eternal force — it operates within the bounds of Yahweh's governance (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 45:7).
<b>II</b>	Yahweh created beings with genuine free will (bechirah, בְּחִירָה). A world with genuine choice is a world in which the wrong choice produces genuine consequences. The covenant sets these terms before the people in advance (Devarim [Deuteronomy] 30:15–19).
<b>III</b>	Not all suffering is the consequence of the sufferer's sin. Yahweh Himself condemned this reasoning in Iyov (Job) 42:7. Applying the Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 evidentiary standard: suffering is not testimony against the sufferer.
<b>IV</b>	The covenant community's right to protest, lament, and cry out directly to Yahweh is preserved throughout the Tanakh — in Iyov (Job), Habakkuk, Tehillim (Psalms), and Eicha (Lamentations). Honest protest is not faithlessness. Silence in the face of injustice is a different matter.
<b>V</b>	The covenant answer to suffering is not a philosophical explanation — it is a covenant encounter. Yahweh's answer to Iyov (Job) from the whirlwind does not explain why Iyov suffered. It reveals who Yahweh is and restores the relationship. The shift is from "why?" to "You are here."
<b>VI</b>	The chesed (חֶסֶד, covenant-love) of Yahweh does not terminate because of suffering. Eicha (Lamentations) 3:22–23 affirms this in the ruins of the destroyed Temple. The covenant relationship outlasts the hardship. Yahweh's faithfulness is new every morning even when the morning is ash.
<b>VII</b>	Yahweh's accounting is not yet complete. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:13–14 and Amos 3:6 both affirm that Yahweh sees every secret deed and governs the full range of human and cosmic history. Observable injustice in the present moment does not represent Yahweh's final verdict. The covenant demands trust in a judgment that is certain even when it is not yet visible.

## PART IX: THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH ACTUALLY SAYS TO THE PERSON WHO SUFFERS

The theodicy problem, as philosophy frames it, asks: "Can the existence of evil be rationally reconciled with belief in an all-good, all-powerful God?" The Tanakh does not take that question seriously on those terms. Instead, it addresses a far more pressing question: "**What does a person — or a community — do when suffering arrives?**"

**The Tanakh's covenant answer is fourfold:**

### FIRST: LAMENT HONESTLY. BRING THE PROTEST TO YAHWEH.

The Tanakh never tells sufferers to pretend that suffering is fine. Iyov (Job) cries. **Habakkuk** protests. **Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah)** curses the day of his birth (Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 20:14). **Tehillim (Psalms)** contains more lament psalms than any other category. The covenant community's right to cry out in honest pain — directed at **Yahweh** Himself — is built into the covenant structure. This is not weakness; it is the covenant relationship functioning as designed. Silence, suppression, or false comfort is what **Yahweh** condemned in Iyov's (Job's) friends.

### SECOND: REFUSE THE RETRIBUTIVE ASSUMPTION.

Do not allow yourself or others to conclude that your suffering is automatic evidence of your sin. **Yahweh's** own verdict condemns that reasoning. The two-or-three-witness standard of **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** governs: suffering is not testimony against the sufferer. Apply that standard to yourself and to every suffering person in your community.

### THIRD: TRUST THE CHESED (COVENANT-LOVE) THAT OUTLASTS THE SUFFERING.

Eicha (Lamentations) 3:22–23 — written in the rubble of a destroyed Temple — is the Tanakh's deepest covenant affirmation. **Yahweh's chesed** (חֶסֶד) does not expire with your circumstances. New every morning. The covenant relationship was not contingent on your comfort. It is grounded in **Yahweh's** own faithfulness, not yours.

### FOURTH: KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. CHOOSE LIFE AGAIN.

The covenant does not wait for the philosophical problem to be resolved before it asks for faithfulness. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:13–14 gives the bottom line: fear **Elohim** and keep His commandments. This is the whole of the human assignment. The accounting of every deed — visible and hidden, just and unjust — belongs to **Yahweh**. The covenant community's task is faithfulness in the present moment, not resolution of the cosmic question.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Tanakh's question is "which did you choose?" rather than "why does evil exist?" How does reframing theodicy as a covenant consequence rather than a cosmic mystery change the practical response to suffering?
  2. Yahweh condemned the retributive theodicy of Iyov's (Job's) friends directly. What forms does retributive theodicy take in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam today? How should covenant communities respond when this reasoning appears?
  3. Iyov (Job) received Yahweh Himself from the whirlwind — not an explanation. Is the covenant answer sufficient for a person experiencing acute suffering? What is the difference between a philosophical answer and a covenant presence?
  4. Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34 attributes significant suffering directly to the failure of religious leadership — not to divine inscrutability. How much of the theodicy problem is actually a leadership accountability problem within the three covenant communities?
  5. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 45:7 declares that Yahweh creates both shalom (wholeness) and ra (calamity). Does this resolve the theodicy problem, or does it raise a different question? What does it mean for a person's trust in Yahweh that He governs both?
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## SCRIPTURE INDEX

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
<b>Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1</b>	Bara (creation) — same verb as Yeshayahu 45:7	I.B
<b>Bereishit (Genesis) 3:17–19</b>	Covenant rupture — structural consequences for creation	V.A
<b>Bereishit (Genesis) 6:5</b>	Yetzer (inclination) of human heart is evil	II.B

<b>Bereishit (Genesis) 8:21</b>	Yetzer of man's heart evil from youth — repeated after flood	II.B
<b>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15</b>	Two-or-three-witness standard — suffering not testimony against sufferer	III.B
<b>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:15–19</b>	Yahweh sets life/good and death/evil before Israel — choose life	II.A
<b>Amos 3:6</b>	Does evil (ra) come to a city unless Yahweh has done it?	IV/W1
<b>Habakkuk 1:2–3</b>	Covenant lament — How long, Yahweh, will you not hear?	IV/W2
<b>Habakkuk 3:17–18</b>	Covenant faithfulness in the absence of material blessing	IV/W2
<b>Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 45:7</b>	Yahweh forms light and creates darkness, makes shalom and creates ra	I.B
<b>Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 53:4–5</b>	Eved Yahweh bears grief — suffering as covenant witness	IV/W4
<b>Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 12:1</b>	Why does the way of the wicked prosper?	III.A
<b>Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34:2–3, 11</b>	False shepherds — suffering from leadership failure	VII
<b>Iyov (Job) 1:9–11</b>	Ha-Satan's accusation — is faithfulness transactional?	III.A
<b>Iyov (Job) 38:4–5</b>	Yahweh speaks from the whirlwind — covenant encounter not explanation	III.C
<b>Iyov (Job) 42:5</b>	My eye now sees You — covenant restoration	III.C
<b>Iyov (Job) 42:7</b>	Yahweh condemns retributive theodicy of the three friends	III.B

<b>Eicha (Lamentations) 1:18</b>	Covenant acknowledgment — Yahweh is righteous in discipline	IV/W3
<b>Eicha (Lamentations) 3:22–23</b>	Chesed of Yahweh never ceases — new every morning	IV/W3
<b>Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 8:14</b>	Observed injustice — ra befalls the righteous, tov befalls the wicked	IV/W5
<b>Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:13–14</b>	Fear Elohim and keep His commandments — full accounting certain	IV/W5

**"I CALL HEAVEN AND EARTH TO WITNESS AGAINST YOU TODAY —  
I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH, BLESSING AND CURSE.  
THEREFORE CHOOSE LIFE, THAT YOU AND YOUR OFFSPRING MAY LIVE."**

*Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh*