

Faith after Auschwitz: Believing in a Good God after the Evil of Hitler

Dr. Michael Rydelnik
Professor of Jewish Studies and Bible
Moody Bible Institute

Faith After Auschwitz



Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed,

Faith After Auschwitz



**Never shall I forget
that smoke.
Never shall I forget
the little faces of
the children,
whose bodies I
saw turned into
wreaths of smoke
beneath a silent
blue sky.**

Faith After Auschwitz

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my Faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.

Elie Wiesel

Faith After Auschwitz

- The Options for Explaining Evil
- Some Perspectives on Evil (General)
- Some Perspectives on the Evil of the Shoah (Specific)
- The Responses to Evil

The Options for Explaining Evil

God is great; God is good,
Let us thank Him for this food.

The Options for Explaining Evil

- Evil exists and there is no God.
(Atheism)
- God exists and there is no Evil.
(Denial of reality)
- God is great but He is not good.
(An Evil God)
- God is good but He is not great.
(An Impotent God)

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- **Humanity has responsibility for evil.**

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Genesis 4:7

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- **There are no good people.**

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. Isaiah 64:6

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- Our experiences do not always match our behavior because we live in an evil world.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8:22

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- Without evil, we would not understand what is good.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- The best of all worlds is not one without evil but one in which evil has been overcome.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Romans 8:20-21

Some Perspectives on Evil (General)

- There are some benefits to evil.

The Benefits of Evil

- Evil turns our attention to God.

I call on the LORD in my distress, and He answers me. Psalm 120:1

The Benefits of Evil

- Evil turns our attention to God.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world .

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

The Benefits of Evil

- Evil creates heroes.

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

The Benefits of Evil

- Evil creates heroes.

They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Hebrews 11:36-38



The Benefits of Evil

- Evil produces maturity.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Romans 5:3-5

The Benefits of Evil

- Evil reminds us that we are not home yet.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:18

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God kept His promise to preserve the Jewish people.

Thus says the LORD,

Who gives the sun for light by day

And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,

Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;

The LORD of hosts is His name:

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God kept His promise to preserve the Jewish people.

*"If this fixed order departs
From before Me," declares the LORD,
"Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
From being a nation before Me forever."*

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God kept His promise to preserve the Jewish people.

Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 31:35-37

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God in His providence used the Shoah to establish the State of Israel (The Price of Redemption).

The Price of Redemption

The reborn State of Israel is the fundamental act of life and meaning of the Jewish people after Auschwitz. To fail to grasp that inextricable connection and response is to utterly fail to comprehend the theological significance of Israel. . . . The point is that after Auschwitz, the existence of the Jew is a great affirmation and an act of faith.

The Price of Redemption

The re-creation of the body of the people, Israel, is renewed testimony to Exodus as ultimate reality, to God's continuing presence in history proven by the fact that His people, despite the attempt to annihilate them, still exist The re-creation of the state is the strongest suggestion that God's promises are still valid and reliable. Irving Greenberg

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- The Shoah was a consequence of the discipline of dispersion.

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God will judge the perpetrators of the Shoah.

Some Perspectives on the Holocaust (Specific)

- God was present with the Jewish people in all their suffering.

In all their affliction, He was afflicted.

Isaiah 63:9

How should we respond to Evil?

- We must respond with repentance.

Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Luke 13:4-5

How should we respond to Evil?

- **We must respond with resistance.**

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.

If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?

Proverbs 24:11-12

How should we respond to Evil?

- **We must respond with compassion.**

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15b

An Old Hasidic Tale

A student who goes to his Rabbi saying: “Oh Master, I love you” The Rabbi responded with a question: “Tell me, do you know what hurts me?” His young student is confused and bewildered. “Why do you ask me such a question, when I’ve just told you I love you?” The old Rabbi shakes his head: “Because, my friend, **if you do not know what hurts me, How can you truly love me?**”