

THREE KEYS

to the
BIBLE

... plus ...

THE CREATOR

Ten Home Study Lessons



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Three Keys to the Bible

KEY NUMBER 1

THE APOSTLE PAUL wrote to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15) One way to rightly divide the Bible is to take note of its time divisions as they relate to the outworking of God's plan for the recovery of the human race from sin and death.

One of the major time contrasts is between the period in human experience when Satan, sin, and death are reigning in the world, and the age when Christ will be reigning to destroy sin and death. Concerning the period of the reign of sin and death we read: "Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." (Mal. 3:15) On the other hand, concerning the era of Christ's reign we read, "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." (Ps. 72:7) Manifestly, if we attempt to apply both of these texts of Scripture to the same period of time, they will be contradictory.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and

worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” (II Tim. 3:12,13) Those in every age who have been loyal to the LORD and to his principles of righteousness have been persecuted by the godless.

But this will not always be true. The Prophet Isaiah wrote of a time when the “rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth.” (Isa. 25:8) This refers to the future, when the kingdom of Christ will be ruling in the affairs of men. Then the righteous will be the favored ones, and all the wicked will God destroy.—Ps. 145:20

Satan is the “god of this world,” and he has blinded the minds of the people and prevented them from knowing God and his beloved Son, Christ Jesus; but of the future age we read that then the knowledge of the LORD will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:9; II Cor. 4:4) At that time, Satan will be bound, and Christ will be the Ruler; thus the great difference in world conditions.—Rev. 20:1-3,6; Ps. 72:8

These are but a few examples of the importance of noting to what period of time in God’s plan a text of Scripture applies, in order to understand it properly, and to see its harmony with other texts. Proper time application is therefore a very important “key” in the unlocking of the Word of God.

KEY NUMBER 2

Another important key to the Scriptures is an understanding of the fact that different rewards are promised to those who faithfully serve the LORD, depending upon the particular time period in which one may live. Beginning with the First

Advent of Jesus, God's promises to his faithful people that in the resurrection they will be exalted to heavenly life. Concerning this the Apostle Peter wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."—I Pet. 1:3,4

This same Apostle Peter, preaching to an audience of unbelieving Jews shortly after Pentecost, told them about the Second Coming of Christ, and explained that following his return there would be "times of restitution of all things." To this Peter added that this future time of restoration had been spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:19-23) No member of the human race has ever lived in heaven, hence could not be restored to heaven. Man was created to live on the earth; thus the restitution, or restoration, of the people means everlasting life on earth, not in heaven.

Therefore, when we study the Bible we will find that some of its promises, particularly those of the Old Testament, describe blessings of health and everlasting life as humans on the earth; while others, particularly those of the New Testament, speak of eternal life in heaven. To bear this in mind is to use a very effective "key" in unlocking the meaning of the Word of God. If we ignore this fact, we may well try to imagine people building houses and planting vineyards in heaven.—Isa. 65:21,22

KEY NUMBER 3

A third important key to use in unlocking the meaning of the Word of God is a recognition of the fact that much of its language is pictorial, or symbolic.

Concerning God's care for his people, David wrote: "The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." (Ps. 23:1,2) We know that this is figurative language, and not literal; but what a beautiful picture it presents of God's loving care!

We find that much figurative language is used in presenting all the various truths of the Bible. Using language literally, the Apostle Paul wrote: "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) To help us grasp the reality of this basic truth of the Word of God, various symbols are used, one of them being fire. Fire is one of the most destructive elements known to man; so the LORD used it to depict the reality and the completeness of the destruction which will eventually befall all incorrigible sinners.

Concerning the future time when Christ will be reigning, the Apostle Peter said that those who then disobey will "be destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:23) Jesus illustrated this destruction of the incorrigibly wicked as being burned in the fires of **Gehenna**, translated "hell" in Matthew 10:28. Failure to note properly this symbolic use of language, some have concluded that the wicked would live in hell forever, whereas hell is scripturally shown to be the condition of destruction, or of death.

The Bible tells us that God created the earth “not in vain,” that he “formed it to be inhabited.” The Bible also declares that “the earth abideth forever.” (Isa. 45:18; Eccles. 1:4) Thus, by these texts and others, the Bible assures us that the earth will never be destroyed, that it will be man’s everlasting home. This is a basic truth of God’s Word, set forth over and over again by literal language.

However, the Bible also teaches that man’s social order, called a “world,” is to be destroyed to make way for the kingdom of Christ. This destruction of a “world” or social order is symbolically described by the use of the words “fire”, “storms”, “earthquakes”, etc. Some have erroneously concluded from these symbolically stated prophecies that God intends to destroy the earth itself by literal fire.

However, this is far from the thought, for the basic fact is that “the earth abideth forever.”—Eccles. 1:4

Thus we have these three “keys” to help us unlock the meaning of the Bible: (1) the proper application of time in the events described; (2) a recognition of the fact that some of the Bible’s promises are heavenly, and some earthly; and (3) noting the fact that the Bible uses both literal and symbolic language. The use of these three “keys” makes the Bible like a new and lucid book.

There IS a God!

MANY GREAT SCIENTISTS of modern times have openly stated their belief in the existence of a supreme, intelligent Creator, among them, Dr. Albert Einstein. A. Cressey Morrison, former President of the New York Academy of Sciences, said, "By unwavering mathematical law we can prove that our universe was designed and executed by a great engineering Intelligence." (From the book, "Man Does Not Stand Alone")

We cannot establish the existence of God through the medium of our five senses. We can neither see, feel, smell, taste, nor touch him. While God is invisible to our natural eyes, we can, nevertheless, discern him in the visible things he has created. (Romans 1:20) This is accomplished by means of our reasoning faculties. The more we ponder over the significance of the marvelous things of the material world with which we are surrounded, the more unwise it seems to deny the existence of a supreme, intelligent Creator. (Psalm 53:1)

We sometimes speak of what a person has made as being a "creation." Actually, however, man's ability to "create" is limited to the use of materials already in existence. Strictly speaking, man does not create a house; rather, he builds a house, using materials which have already been created.

But, even the building of a house calls for plans, specifications, measurements, and the use of proper materials. A foundation has to be laid and firmly secured. The superstructure must be properly built upon the foundation. The house needs a roof, and the various rooms must be built according to a plan and specifications. A house does not just happen to come into existence. Every house, or any other building, evidences the work of an intelligent designer and builder. So the earth itself, the home, or “house” provided for man, also reveals the existence of a Designer and Builder.—Job 38:4-8

And what great wisdom is displayed in the Creation of the earth! Think of the ingenious circulatory system by which the land surfaces of the earth are watered to make possible the growth of vegetation and food! (Job 38:25-28) What an endless variety there is of trees, of fruit, of flowers, and all so intricately designed and exquisitely beautiful!

Man can make an artificial flower, but he cannot give it life. We can admire the blade of grass and the mighty trees of the forest, but we cannot create them, nor do we understand what makes them live. We may plant an acorn in the ground and discern that later it has grown into a sturdy oak. We can marvel about this, but cannot explain how it happened. Some may say it is simply nature, but the wise will say it is an evidence of the existence of nature’s God. (Psalm 107:43)

The human mind seems still more hopelessly inadequate when it peers into the heavens and there, too, sees displayed the mighty works of an

Intelligent Creator. (Psalm 19:1,2) The astronomer's telescope reveals the tremendous reaches of the universe and its countless millions of stars and planets. We know that all these are governed by fixed laws, and reason tells us that these laws could have been established only by divine intelligence. If our reason leads us to such a conclusion, then we will reverence our great Creator and will want to learn all we can about him, so that we can know him intimately, do his bidding, and copy his ways.—Proverbs 1:7, John 17:3

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

The following questions are answered in the preceding short article. Can you answer them?

—What is the thinking of many of our modern scientists concerning the existence of a supreme, intelligent Creator?

—Can we establish the existence of God by means of any of our five senses? What does the Bible say?

—Do humans have the ability to create?

—How does the need for planning in the building of a house prove the existence of the Creator?

—Do any of us know the secret of life?

—What does reason tell us concerning the laws which govern the universe?

REFERENCE MATERIAL

“The Divine Plan of the Ages,” Chapter 2 “The New Creation,” pages 20-22

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

We perceive God through the visible things of his Creation.

The earth, man’s “house”, or home, was designed by God, the Creator.

All the inflexible laws which govern the universe reveal the existence of a Lawgiver.

God Revealed in Animal Life

THERE IS A POEM which states that “only God can make a tree,” (“Trees,” by Joyce Kilmer) and this thought is even more conclusive when we think of the almost countless varieties of trees which God has made. This same faith-strengthening reasoning can be carried over into the animal kingdom. Only a supreme, intelligent Creator could produce the myriad varieties of animals, birds, and fish, and provide the appropriate food and surroundings enabling them to continue their existence.

The peacock is noted for its gorgeous plumage, while the ostrich is rather plain in appearance, although its feathers are much in demand. By comparison with the ostrich, the peacock moves about quite slowly, but the ostrich is able to run at great speed. What determines these differences? Reason tells us that here is displayed the planning and work of an intelligent Creator.

In most cases the birds and lower animals instinctively exercise great care over their young. The birds sit on the eggs from which their offspring are hatched. But with the ostrich it is different. The mother ostrich simply buries her eggs in the sand and then leaves them, evincing no interest in

what might happen thereafter. The warmth they need for incubation is in the sunbaked sand. But the eggs are hidden from most danger, and, unlike most other birds, the mother ostrich is not on hand to afford protection for her young.—Job 39:13-18

Did this maternal indifference of the ostrich just happen to be? Oh, that is just a matter of instinct, some may answer. But why should there be such a variety of instincts in the animal creation? Besides, what is instinct? The dictionary says that instinct is “the hereditary factor in behavior.” But whence came this hereditary factor that enables fowl, animal, and fish, to survive? Reason tells us that instinct is a creation of God. This is particularly apparent when we consider the widely variant instincts with which the animal creations have been endowed. What causes young salmon, after spending four years in the ocean, to seek and travel up the identical river where they were born, there to spawn and die? And whence came the instinct which causes some birds to migrate from north to south, and from south to north, with the changing seasons? How do they know that it will be warm in the south, and that they would freeze or starve to death in the north?

Innumerable pages would be required to call attention to all the fascinating varieties of instincts displayed throughout the animate creative works of God. To say that such variety came about by mere chance is to stifle reason and to distort the good judgment with which we have been endowed by the Creator.

And herein is another proof of the existence and work of the Creator. The lower animal creations do

not understand why they act as they do; but man has been given the ability to understand, if he will, and choose his ways. He may go south or remain north in the winter as he reasons and decides which move to make. Thus man is set apart from the other animate creations, and this also we see as an evidence of the existence of a wise and loving Creator. (Job 32:8; also "The New Creation," pages 55-58)

STUDENTS HELPS

QUESTIONS

The following questions are answered in the preceding short article. What do these answers mean to you?

—How does the endless variety of life in the animal kingdom prove the existence of a supreme, intelligent Creator?

—What determined the great differences of appearance and abilities between the peacock and the ostrich?

—What is indicated by the mother ostrich's lack of interest in her young, in contrast with the maternal instincts of other birds?

—What is instinct, and why do the lower animals possess it?

—What is the true explanation as to why man is able to reason rather than to be guided by instinct?

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

Reason tells us that the great varieties of species found in the animal kingdom, and all fixed, did not develop by chance but through the guidance of a supreme, intelligent Creator.

The instincts of the lower animals are endowments of a Creator, not the haphazard process of nature.

One of the great distinctions between man and the lower animals is seen in the differences between instinct and reason, both being endowments by the Creator.

God Revealed in Man

ALL ANIMATE AND inanimate things of which man has knowledge proclaim to reason that there is a God. The intricacies of the life principle are quite beyond the ability of the human mind fully to understand. This is true in the earthly realm from the lowest form of shellfish right on up to man, the highest order of animate life. This is particularly true of man, whose body, animated by the breath of life, is one of the marvels of the universe.—Psalm 139:14,15

And one of the amazing things about humans is their ability to reason upon available facts and to reach logical conclusions. We are living in the day of electronic computers. Data is fed into these computers for the purpose of obtaining certain information, and in a relatively short space of time they produce the answers sought. It is claimed by authorities that an electronic computer capable of reaching all the conclusions potentially possible to the human brain, would need to be as large as the Empire State building in New York City. And this electronic marvel can process data only in response to facts fed into it by an intelligent human being.

And yet, how small is the human brain! Besides, even though a computer can be constructed by

human wisdom to do the mechanical reckoning heretofore done by the brain, it lacks feelings of any kind. If a computer informs its owner that he has prospered in business, it registers no joy; if he is bankrupt, it displays no sorrow. But in man's little brain there is the potential mathematical ability of the most complicated electronic computer ever built, and a thousand times over, plus a sympathetic understanding of the implications in the conclusions at which it is capable of arriving. Could such a capability just happen to function? (Job 38:36) The obvious answer is no, that here is irrefutable proof of the existence of a supreme, intelligent Creator.

Besides, by noting the reasoning characteristics of man, as translated into human behavior, we learn something about the Creator, for the Bible tells us that man was created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27,28; also "The New Creation," page 39) All Creation reveals the intelligence of the Creator and his ability to reason. (Isaiah 1:18) Man's puny mind, while not able to understand a great deal about God's Creation is, nevertheless, able to reason upon the basis of his limited knowledge and to reach the conclusion that there is a God.

Man is fallen and imperfect. (Psalm 51:5) Many humans are even degraded and debauched. However, there are many noble specimens of humanity all around us, and in these we see the qualities of sympathy, justice, and love. Since man was created in the image of God, we therefore conclude that the Creator is sympathetic, just, and loving.

Man has also been endowed with the ability to conceive the idea of a great God and Creator over

all. This not only sets man apart from all the lower forms of animal life, but is an additional proof that he is a created being, and not an accident of an unguided evolutionary process. From the dawn of Biblical history man has been a worshipping creature, (Genesis 4:3-5) and among the truly wise of the human race, is no less so today. Prof. Pasteur, the noted bacteriologist, testified that he prayed while he worked. ("The New Creation," page 44, paragraphs 1 and 2)

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

These questions are based on the foregoing brief discussion of the manner in which man, as a created being, is himself one of the proofs of the existence of the Creator. Can you answer them?

—What is implied by the fact that the intricacies of life are quite beyond the ability of human wisdom to understand?

—How does the human brain compare in ability with modern electronic computers? Give an example.

—What characteristic of the human brain is totally absent in the mechanism of an electronic computer?

—What can we learn about God by noting the reasoning and behavior of the noble-minded among the human race?

—What is indicated by man's inherent desire to worship a higher power than himself?

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

While man's ability to reason and make decisions is in itself an evidence that he is the handiwork of a divine Creator, even more so is his ability to react emotionally to his reasoning and to the circumstances with which he is surrounded.

Since, as the Bible declares, man was created in the image of God, all the kindly qualities of the noble-minded reflect, in more or less degree, the goodness and love our Creator.

The Creator's Wisdom

IN MYRIAD WAYS God's wisdom is displayed in his creative works. One of these is the occasional exception to the laws by which all inanimate things of creation are governed. For example, the general law is that substances expand with heat and contract with cold. An exception to this is in the freezing of water. If water contracted as it froze, ice would then be heavier than water, and the end of winter throughout half of the earth would find the rivers and lakes solid cakes of ice. But God's exception to this law of nature averts such a catastrophe.

Wisdom beyond our comprehension is displayed in all created things. We are particularly interested in divine wisdom as we see it in operation in connection with his provisions for man, whom he created in his image and to be king of earth. ("The New Creation," page 39) One evidence of this is in the relationship of parents to children. God endowed the lower animals with certain instincts which cause them to make essential preparation for their young and to care for them for a short time after they are born; but this instinct is devoid of lasting interest in, and love for, the offspring.

How different in the case of humans! A human child is helpless when it is born. It needs the loving and tender care of its mother and generally gets it.

The love of both parents for their child generally increases, and the child learns to appreciate and love its parents. God's wisdom designed it so, and it is related to the fact that we are created in the image of God. The Creator loves his children and is pleased when they realize their dependence on him, and out of this there grows love and loyalty.—Isaiah 49:15; Psalm 103:13

God's wisdom is displayed by permitting man to be subjected to temptation, as he was in the Garden of Eden. The universe is filled by created things compelled to obey the Creator's law. The stars are given no choice as to the orbit in which they will travel or how fast they will revolve in that orbit. But the Creator was not limited to exacting this sort of obedience. He created man in his own image and gave him a choice between obedience and disobedience.—Genesis 2:16,17; Joshua 24:15

God's wisdom enabled him to know in advance that, through lack of experience, man would choose the course of disobedience and thus incur the penalty of death, as had been stipulated. God's wisdom decreed that all of Adam's children would share in this death condemnation. By this wise arrangement, it was possible for one man—even Jesus Christ, who was made flesh for this purpose—to redeem from death Adam and his entire progeny who lost life through and in him.—Acts 15:18; Romans 5:12; I Corinthians 15:21,22

By this wise arrangement, each generation of Adam's children has had an opportunity to experience the disastrous results of disobedience to divine law. Thus far few have known the true significance

of their plight, but the Creator's wisdom has arranged their awakening from the sleep of death at a time when the educational program of Christ's kingdom will be in operation, and then they will learn. Thus they will, by experience, have learned both good and evil, and will be in a position to make an intelligent choice between the two. (Isaiah 26:9; Isaiah 29:24; also "The Divine Plan of the Ages," chapter 7)

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

—Here are a few questions based on the preceding short article pertaining to divine wisdom. How many of them can you answer?

—What is one of the exceptions to the laws of nature which reveals the wisdom of the Creator?

—How is the wisdom of God displayed in the parental relationship of humans to their children?

—Was it wise for God to permit our first parents to be tempted?

—If so, can you explain why?

—When will the human race as a whole have an opportunity to benefit from the Creator's wise permission of evil?

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

The occasional exception to be noted in nature's laws is one of the proofs that these laws were framed by a supreme Lawgiver.

Parental love for children demonstrates that man was created in the image of God.

God's wisdom is displayed in permitting man to choose obedience or disobedience, for it is through the permission of evil that true, free-will obedience to the Creator is demonstrated and attained.

God's Eternal Justice

THROUGHOUT ALL THE ages of human experience, innocent men, women, and children have suffered. Is it just for God to permit an innocent infant to be afflicted with a painful disease and ultimately to die? There are thousands of situations in which the question of God's justice is raised. Assuming that God is all-powerful and therefore able to control human experience, why does he permit the innocent to suffer? In the absence of a satisfactory answer to this question, some might well question the existence of God.

The operation of God's justice in his dealings with his human creatures can be understood only in the light of his plan as a whole. One would properly question the motives of a surgeon who cuts into a human body to remove a malignant growth, or a diseased organ, were it not known that the objective sought is the person's health and well-being. The healthy unaffected organs of the body might well suffer as the malignancy is being removed, but those involved understand the reason and are quite willing to have it so.

The principle of justice is well illustrated by the balanced apothecary's scale. With the scale, the illustration is in equality of weight. In God's relationship to man, it is in equality of dealings.

The Creator is the source of life and its blessings, so he has the right to decide the terms upon which these blessings may be obtained and maintained. (Acts 17:24-28; Job 12:10) Adam was God's creation. He owed his life to his Creator.

Adam also owed obedience to his Creator; and the Creator, in his wisdom, exacted the death penalty for disobedience, not because he was vindictive, but because it would result in the greatest good to Adam and to his progeny. (Genesis 3:17-19) Think of the havoc that would be wrought if the earth were to disobey the laws of gravitation by which it is kept in its proper orbit! So, if man were permitted to live in disobedience to divine law, there would be no end to the chaos and suffering that would result.

Man was justly condemned to death. The penalty was death, so if man was to be rescued from death the demands of divine justice against him must be satisfied. The Creator's wisdom provided the way, which was through Christ, the Redeemer. Jesus became a substitute in death for Adam and for the unborn race in his loins when he sinned. The Bible refers to this as a ransom, or corresponding price.—I Timothy 2:3-6

While God's love is involved in this plan, it is his justice that opens the way for man's release from sin and death. Meanwhile, the human race has continued to suffer, the innocent with the guilty. The Just compensation for this will be in the blessed experiences of the enhanced joy which will be made available to all as they are restored to life. Then, as they look back upon the experiences through which they passed during the reign of sin and death, they will thank God for them; for

thereby they will be led to a more profound appreciation of their loving Creator, whom they will have the opportunity of obeying and serving forever.—Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 29:24; Revelation 21:4

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

Here are some of the questions answered in the foregoing short article on the topic, “God’s Eternal Justice.” Do you know the plan of God well enough to answer these questions?

—Why has the suffering of the innocent caused some to question the existence of God?

—How only can we understand the operation of God’s justice in his dealings with the human race?

—Explain the principle of justice. How is it illustrated by the apothecary’s scale?

—Explain the wisdom of the just penalty of death which resulted from Adam’s disobedience.

—Explain how justice operates to provide the release of the human race from death.

—What compensation will there be for the sufferings of the human race during the reign of sin and death?

REFERENCE MATERIAL

“The Divine Plan of the Ages,” pages 149 to 159

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

A proper understanding of the operation of God's justice is possible only in the light of the divine plan of redemption from death.

All life is dependent upon God, who justly demands the obedience of his intelligent creatures.

What now appears unjust in human experiences will be understood and appreciated in the age of restoration from death.

The Creator's Love

THE GREAT CREATOR of the universe dispenses blessings to his earthly creatures with a lavish hand. His love has made provision for the lower creatures as well as for man. He takes delight in exercising his loving-kindness throughout the earth, causing the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon all. These blessings are available even for those of his human creation who, in their folly, disbelieve in his existence, and oftentimes blaspheme him.—Matthew 5:43-45; Jeremiah 9:23,24

Because man is sinful and fallen, and because the command to subdue the earth has not yet been carried out, there are times when human suffering and apparent unbalances in the material world seem to belie God's loving interest in his earthly creatures. It is in such circumstances that we need to understand the divine plan for the ultimate elimination of all evil in order to see through the dark circumstances of life.

Man sinned and brought upon himself the penalty for sin, which is death. God's love provided redemption from death through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:23; John 3:16,17; Romans 5:8; I John 4:9-12) God's gift of his Son to suffer and die for the sin-cursed and dying race is a most outstanding evidence of his love.

No gift has ever been so great, or so costly to the giver.

While the Scriptures declare that it was God's love for the world that caused him to send his Son to earth to be the Redeemer and Savior of mankind, our appreciation of that love is enhanced by the assurance given us in the Bible that a full and complete opportunity is to be given to all mankind to benefit from God's gift. Only those who believe will receive everlasting life through Christ, but the opportunity to believe is not limited to this present short span of imperfect life.—I Timothy 2:3- 6; also "The Divine Plan of the Ages," pages 104-107)

While God's love is abundantly manifested by the gift of his dear Son, we see a further evidence of his love in his invitation to believers of the present age to suffer and die with Jesus that they might live and reign with him. Through the Holy Spirit these are made sons of God on the divine plane. (II Peter 1:4; also "The Divine Plan of the Ages," pages 277-282) This is truly a marvelous manifestation of God's love. (I John 3:1-3) It is beyond the ability of our finite minds fully to understand the length and breadth and height and depth of God's love which provided that some few of the fallen, imperfect members of the human race should not only be redeemed from death through Jesus but should be called to joint-heirship in his kingdom; and yet the Scriptures reveal that this is the divine plan for a "little flock" selected from the world upon the basis of their faith and obedience. (Ephesians 2:1-7; Luke 12:32) Such love should call forth a hearty response of love and devotion on the part of all whose hearts are opened to receive it.

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

—These questions on the love of God are answered in the preceding article. Can you answer them, and document your answer with a text of Scripture?

—Does God ever bestow his blessings upon the unrighteous?

—What knowledge do we need to have, to be assured that God does love his human creatures despite the suffering that is in the world?

—Name the outstanding act of the Creator which proves his love for the sinful race of mankind.

—Is the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Redeemer limited to the present short span of life?

—Explain the manner in which God's love is especially manifested toward the footstep followers of Jesus.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

To know the love of God truly, it is essential to have a knowledge of the divine plan of the ages.

The greatest manifestation of God's love is in the gift of his Son to be man's Redeemer from sin and death.

Our All-Seeing God

NO ONE HAS seen God at any time. (John 1:18) Indeed, no one can see him and live. (Exodus 33:20) But while we do not know his appearance, his character is revealed to us through his beloved Son, Christ Jesus. (John 14:9) We note the sympathy and love of Jesus, and we know that these same qualities are possessed by our loving Creator.

In addition to this, the Bible helps us to grasp more fully the idea of our Heavenly Father's love for his people by symbolic references to his "eyes," his "ears," and his "arms." This does not mean that God possesses eyes and ears and arms like ours, but by the use of these as symbols we are given a clearer concept of our Heavenly Father's powers and of his intimate love for us.

Just as we see with our eyes and are aware of what is transpiring within the range of our sight, so the Creator knows what is happening to his people, for they are always within range of his "vision." He is never weary, never faint, and is always ready and willing to give strength to his people in their every time of need.—I Peter 3:12; Isaiah 40:28-31

Our Heavenly Father said of his ancient people Israel, who typified spiritual Israel of the Gospel Age, that those who touched them to do them

injury, touched the apple of his eye. (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8) What an endearing symbol this is of how precious to him our Father considers his children to be!

The Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth. (II Chronicles 16:9) This, also, is pictorial language, but how vividly it brings before us the idea of the Creator's ability to know what is happening everywhere. In this instance the assurance is given that the Lord's interest is to note the faithfulness of his own people and to give them the necessary protection from their enemies and the needed strength to serve him.

We are informed by the Scriptures that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Proverbs 15:3) How vividly this language conveys the idea of God's ability to "see," or to know, what is taking place everywhere, that nothing can be hid from his sight. Conscious of this discerning ability of his God, David prayed that his words and thoughts, even the very thoughts of his heart, might be acceptable in his sight.—Psalm 19:14

The human eye is limited in its vision. We can see only those things which are physical, or material. But God's "eyes" are not thus limited, for he can search our minds and discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. (Hebrews 4:13) How careful we should be to keep our thoughts and motives pure!

Jesus will be the great Judge of the people during the world's coming judgment day, and we are told that he will not judge after "the sight of his eyes."

(Isaiah 11:1-5) Thus we are reminded of the limitation of human eyesight and that Jesus, who is now “the express image” of his Heavenly Father, will have the ability to see into the minds of the people and will therefore know how to judge them correctly. (Hebrews 1:3) How wonderful are our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son!

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

The answer to these questions should help us understand our loving Creator somewhat more intimately. Do you know these answers?

—What is the outstanding attribute of God’s character?

—Since no human can literally see God, what is one of the ways in which his character is revealed to us?

—How are the capabilities of God revealed to us through symbolic language?

—What does the Bible mean in its references to the “eyes” of the Lord?

—How do the “eyes” of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, and for what purpose?

—Are God’s “eyes” limited in their vision as ours are?

—Will Jesus, as the future Judge of the world, be limited to what human eyes might be able to discern concerning those who are being judged?

REFERENCE MATERIAL

“Hymns of Dawn,” No. 293

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

God’s attribute of love is specially manifested by his solicitude for his faithful people here on earth, as revealed by the symbolic references to his “eyes,” “ears,” and “arms.”

God Hears and Cares

GOD'S LOVING INTEREST in his people and his care for them are brought feelingly to our attention by the Bible's many references to his ability to "hear" when we cry to him for help, and that he bears us up in his everlasting "arms." (Psalm 34:15-19; 20:6; Deuteronomy 33:27) To make his love more understandable and more intimate, the Scriptures represent God as inclining his ear toward his people to make sure that he hears their prayers.—Psalm 116:1,2; 40:1

The Lord has not promised to hear favorably the prayers of his people if their requests are not in harmony with his will. (I John 5:14,15; also "The New Creation," page 679 to and including paragraph 1, page 680) God is abundantly able to grant us all the blessings for which we pray and will do so if our requests are in keeping with the principles of his plan and laws. The Scriptures tell us that God has a "mighty arm," and a "strong hand," and that these will be used in keeping with justice, mercy, and truth.—Psalm 89:13,14

During the present Gospel Age the Lord is dealing only with those whom he is preparing to live and reign with Christ in his thousand-year kingdom. When that kingdom is fully established, and the knowledge of the Lord is filling the

earth, "all flesh" will be lifting up their hearts in prayer to God, and he will "hear." (Psalm 65:2; Isaiah 65:24) How the people will then rejoice that they have learned to know, to love, and to serve the true and living God, the loving Creator of the universe!—Isaiah 25:9

Meanwhile, the Lord has not been indifferent to the sufferings of fallen mankind. The Scriptures represent him as looking down from heaven and seeing conditions on the earth, and hearing the groanings of the people, who are as prisoners of death. It is indicated that the Lord has pity for these prisoners and will release them. (Psalm 102:19,20) The releasing of the prisoners of death is the great work of Christ during the thousand years of his kingdom. It is a work that was planned by God's wisdom, having been motivated by his love.

This loving future work of God, through Christ, is spoken of in the Scriptures as the opening of his hand to satisfy the desires of "every living thing." When, in the kingdom of Christ, this promise is being fulfilled, the people will find that the Lord is very near to them. Those who truly fear or reverence him will be saved, or rescued completely, from death, and will live forever. (Psalm 145:16-19)

This blessed kingdom work of the future is prophesied as being accomplished by the "arm" of the Lord, Jesus. (Isaiah 52:10; Psalm 98:1) This arm, the prophecy states, is to be "made bare," so that all can see it. No longer will the people wonder about God's love, for it will be revealed to them that the blessings of that day are the result of the gift of his own dear Son to be their Redeemer and Savior.

Up to now this “Arm” of the Lord has been revealed only to a few, comparatively speaking. He was despised and rejected of men. Few indeed at Jesus’ first advent recognized that he had come as the gift of God’s love to save the people from their sin; so they persecuted him, and put him to death. —Isaiah 53:1-5

But we can rejoice that during Christ’s second visit to earth the situation will be vastly different. Then the people from all the ends of the earth will recognize him, and will rejoice in the salvation which he has provided for them.

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

These questions are answered in this short article, “God Hears and Cares.” Do you know the answers to them?

—What lessons do we derive from the Bible’s references to God’s “ears” and “arms”?

—Upon what condition does God answer the prayers of his People?

—When will the people of all the world—“all flesh”—have their prayers answered?

—Does the seeming long delay in the fulfillment of God’s promises to bless all the families of the earth imply that he has been indifferent to human needs?

—When will God satisfy the desire of “every living thing”?

—Who is the “Arm” of the Lord that will, in God’s due time, be made “bare” for all the world to see?

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

God assures his people of his loving watchfulness over their interests and of his ability to care for them.

In the present Gospel Age God is caring specially only for those whom he has called to joint-heirship in Christ’s kingdom. In the kingdom age his care will be manifested toward all the willing and obedient of mankind.

The Almighty God

IT IS A SELF-EVIDENT truth that the great Creator of the universe is of necessity all-powerful. Job expressed this fact beautifully when he said to God, "I know that thou canst do every thing." (Job 42:2) The almighty power of God is manifested in all his creative works. Life itself is a mighty force beyond the ability of the human mind to conceive.

In this lesson we are particularly interested in the power of God as it relates to the outworking of his plan for the redemption and recovery of the human race from sin and death. This plan is motivated by divine love. It is based on the justice of God and was conceived by the Creator's wisdom. But the plan itself would have no validity if its Author lacked the ability to carry it out. However, we are assured that God is abundantly able to accomplish every detail of his plan.—Isaiah 55:10,11

The miracle-working power of God is required for the accomplishment of essentially every detail of his plan of salvation. It was God's love that prompted him to give his Son to be man's Redeemer, but the presentation of this gift called for the exercise of mighty power. It was necessary that Jesus be made flesh by the transfer of his life to the womb of Mary to be born a human. (John 1:14,15)

The Holy Spirit, or power of God sustained Jesus throughout the trying years of his earthly ministry.

Finally, when Jesus had given his humanity in death, dying on the cross, the power of his Heavenly Father raised him from the dead and exalted him to his own right hand in divine glory.—Ephesians 1:17-23

Throughout the Gospel Age the Holy Spirit, or power of God, has been working in the hearts and lives of Jesus' true followers. They have been made spiritually strong in the power of his might. (Ephesians 6:10) The truly faithful have experienced the same almighty power sustaining them as that which gave Jesus the strength to suffer and to die. (II Timothy 1:7; Philippians 3:10, 11) And then, at the end of the age, these, like Jesus, are raised from the dead to live and reign with him for a thousand years, to restore mankind in general to life on the earth.—Revelation 20:6; I Corinthians 6:14

Christ and his followers will be the invisible rulers in that kingdom and will be represented on earth by those ancient servants of God from Abel to John the Baptist. The Bible says that these will be made "princes in all the earth." (Psalm 45:16) And divine power will raise these from the dead as perfect humans.—Hebrews 11:35,39,40; 12:23

But this is not all, for there will follow the awakening from the sleep of death of all the billions of the human race who were condemned to death in Adam and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. (I Corinthians 15:21,22) To believe this should not place a strain on our faith, for the One who has planned and promised it is the great God of the universe who created life in the first place. Surely this almighty God is abundantly able to restore life.

And it will not be merely an awakening from death, but all the willing and obedient of the kingdom age will be restored to human perfection just as Adam possessed it before he sinned. This will also call for the exercise of divine power. This will be the “restitution” of all things.—Acts 3:20,21

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

There is nothing more important than to learn all we can about our loving Creator. How many of these questions can you answer?

—How did Job describe God’s almighty power?

—By what means is the wise, just, and loving plan of God accomplished?

—What is one way in which the power of God was exercised in the giving of his Son to be man’s Redeemer?

—By what means was Jesus sustained in his trials, and raised from the dead?

—How has the work of God in the earth during the Gospel Age been accomplished?

—Who will be the visible representatives of Christ during his reign on earth, and how does divine power make this possible?

—By what means will the promises of God to

restore all the dead to life be accomplished? Will this be merely an awakening from the sleep of death?

REFERENCE MATERIAL

“The Atonement Between God and Man,” pages 417, par. 2, to 420, and 346, par. 5

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

The attribute of power, combined with divine wisdom, justice, and love, assure us of the glorious success of the Creator’s plan to bless all mankind with joy and life.

The Glory of God

THE PERSONAL GLORY of the Creator is quite beyond our comprehension, but we can understand to some extent the glorious virtues of his character. We might say that God's infinite wisdom, his unyielding justice, his boundless love, and his almighty power, in perfect balance as they are, together reveal his glory.

We can "see" God's glory through an understanding of his plan for the redemption and recovery of the human race from death. But the world in general does not possess this knowledge, and therefore does not now "see" the glory of God. But with the full establishment of the kingdom of Christ this situation will change.

Then the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth, and all shall know and serve him. (Isaiah 11:9; Zephaniah 3:9) Then all flesh will "see," or discern, the glory of God.—Isaiah 40:5

The whole world will then know of God's justice as represented in the divine penalty for sin. They will know how divine wisdom found the way whereby God could be just, yet release the condemned world from death. (Romans 3:26) They will know that it was divine love that provided the Redeemer, who himself lovingly died for their sins. (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; I John 2:2) The world will also then

discern, even better than we are able to comprehend at the present time, the miracle-working power of God; for they will see it demonstrated in the resurrection of the dead. Since all the dead from every part of the earth eventually are to be awakened from death, the glory of God will indeed fill the earth.—Acts 24:15

The glory of God was reflected to a limited degree in our first parents, whom he created in his image and crowned with glory and honor. (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:4, 5) As a result of the reign of sin and death, man has lost much of his original perfection, although there are degrees of the divine qualities of justice, sympathy, and love to be found in many persons even now.

During the Gospel Age God has been inviting a company of people to come out from the world, offering them the privilege of striving, through the exercise of faith, for a change of nature, from the human to the divine. (II Peter 1:4) Those who reach this high position in the resurrection will attain also unto the divine glory.—I Corinthians 15:47-49

All who do not attain to spiritual glory in the resurrection will be restored to human perfection during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom. And think what a change that will be! ("The Divine Plan of the Ages," pages 191-193) It will be a progressive return to holiness, or perfection, which the Bible likens to traveling over a "highway."—Isaiah 35:8

This "highway" is in reality the return road, not only to life, but to the image and glory of God. All have been ransomed by Jesus and will return

from the sleep of death. If they then accept the provisions of divine love through Christ and obey the laws of his kingdom, they will obtain eternal joy and gladness; and sorrow, sickness, and death will be no more. (Isaiah 35:10; Revelation 21:1-5)

The Bible assures us that all will then acclaim the glory of God, and the glory of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, the “Lamb” that was slain to take away the sin of the world. (Revelation 5:13; John 1:29) They will then sing that inspiring song recorded in Revelation 15:3,4, Revised Version

STUDENT HELPS

QUESTIONS

Test your knowledge! To know the correct answers to these questions is important to all who would be pleasing to the Lord.

—Explain one manner in which the glory of God’s character is revealed.

—Can the unbelieving world “see” God’s glory? When will the knowledge of God’s glory fill the earth?

—In what manner will the world of mankind, during the kingdom age, see the glory of God manifested, even more clearly than we do now?

—What Scripture text affirms that our first parents were endowed with a measure of God’s glory?

—Will any members of the human race ever attain to a measure of God’s glory?

—Will man’s restoration to perfection be instantaneous?

—What is the “highway” of Isaiah 35:8?

—How do we know that the whole world ultimately will ascribe glory to the Creator, and to his Son, Christ Jesus?

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

The glory of God’s character is reflected by his wisdom, justice, love, and power. This glory eventually will be recognized by all mankind.