

To print this booklet just click "Print" on your browser's menu.

Why Does God Permit Evil?



The history of the human family presents a dark picture of sorrow, suffering, and death. Through famine, plague, storms, and accidents, our race has drunk deeply of the cup of anguish. What is God's program concerning man's suffering? Why does God permit evil? What is the remedy? "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14).

"For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death."—Psalm 102:19,20

The age-old question has been, Why has an all-powerful, all wise Creator permitted pain and suffering? Why has he permitted the continuing reign of sin and death for more than sixty centuries?

Perhaps no difficulty has presented itself more frequently to inquiring minds than this. Could not God have prevented man's fall? Why does he not deal with the human family as graciously, kindly, lovingly, as he deals with his angelic sons? Is it just or loving for God to permit the bringing forth of millions of creatures under these unfavorable conditions, beset by weakness and a tendency toward sin from their birth and surrounded by others similarly weak and helpless?

Human philosophers fail to answer the question because the answer is far too deep for human philosophy. Those who reject the divine origin of the Bible may as well abandon hope of finding an answer. Only God can explain his own secrets—why he has done as he has. Truly we read, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

The difficulty in understanding what God is doing arises from our failure to recognize God's plan in this world. He could have prevented sin's entrance. The fact that he did not should suggest that its permission is designed for some ultimate good. God's plans seen in their completeness will prove the wisdom of his course.

The Bible shows us that God's purpose for men is progressive, embracing long periods of time. If we ignore these periods when they can be seen in their completeness, we are blinded to the answer to our question. Accepting these, Bible students may look at the subject from God's standpoint and may understand the mystery of God. This mystery has been hidden from ages and generations and has now been made known unto his saints (Colossians 1:26,27).

What is this mystery? Simply stated, God's plan will glorify him through its ultimate enlightenment of angels and mankind. In the ages to come trials and reverses, sorrows and tears will be proven to have been a worthwhile part of that program.

Man, A Convict

To analyze our subject we turn to the beginning of earth's troubles. The sacred record explains that man's fall from life and the perfection in which he was created had been foreseen by the Creator. Therefore, the penalty of sin, death (Genesis 2:17), was arranged so as to be gradually inflicted. This happens through man's conflict with the unfavorable conditions of the unprepared earth (of climate, sterility of soil, storms, thorns, weeds).

God foresaw that through our experiences such a penalty would teach man a lesson about sin and its results. That lesson, thus learned, would never need to be repeated. It would be an everlasting lesson to all; especially when Christ's reign of righteousness shall show, by contrast, the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Experiences teach us that God planned for our struggles upon this earth to be beneficial: our minds are exercised by grappling with earth's disturbances and imperfections, our conscience is exercised by combating our weaknesses, and our harmony with God is enhanced as we learn to call upon God's sympathy.

For Thy Sake

There is deep meaning in the Creator's words to his fairly tried and justly condemned creatures. He sent them out among the thorns and briars, to labor in pain, sorrow, and disease, as well as to be subjected to the casualties and calamities of nature's unfinished work. He said, "cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Genesis 3:17); that is, the earth is in its present condition for our profit and experience, even though we may not recognize this fact.

The condemned pair had children. These children inherited the curse from their parents. That included imperfections and weaknesses as well as the ultimate penalty for these, death. This is verified by Job: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4) Mankind has been learning what sin and evil are (and their undesirable results) and he has been preparing the earth for the later purposes of God.

Labor and toil were prescribed for man's good. Until this century they have kept man so busy that he has been unable to plan or perform evil to the extent he otherwise could have done. With the proliferation of evil, with leisure, man has turned his attention to plotting and scheming. Under these circumstances, what a mercy our short life span is! Were the same "shrewd businessmen" who now accumulate millions in a few short years to live 930 years (as Adam did), what might we expect? One man, or a syndicate or trust, could conceivably own every foot of land, control every drop of water and every breath of air, and have the remainder of mankind as his slaves.

World Redemption Coming

It is clear that God's action in exposing his creatures to death, pain, and calamities, relates only to their present life on earth. He did not give the slightest intimation of any continuance of life in any other locality. On the contrary, the penalty was "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). "Dying shalt thou die" (Genesis 2:17, margin).

True, God promised that at some time a son of the woman would deliver mankind (Genesis 3:15), but it was an indefinite hope. Yet, God showed that although he dealt severely with men, according to laws and justice, he was also sympathetic. He would relieve man without violating his own character.

Humanity was created with morality, the sense of right and wrong, and the liberty to use it. The law of right and wrong was written in his constitution. It was a part of his nature, just as it is a part of God's character. But, this image or likeness to God, this law originally inscribed in the nature of man, has lost much of its clarity through the degrading influence of sin. It is not, today, what it was in the first man.

The ability to love implies the ability to hate. Therefore, we may reason that the Creator could not make man in his own likeness, with power to love and to do right, without the corresponding ability to hate and to do wrong. This liberty of choice is termed free moral agency, or free will, and is a part of man's original endowment. This, along with the full measure of his mental and moral faculties, is what made him an "image" of his Creator. After six thousand years of degradation so much of the original likeness has been corrupted by sin that we are not free. We are bound by sin's results. Sin is easier and more agreeable to the fallen race than is righteousness.

St. Paul tells us that God permitted the entrance of sin and death for man's training and education. God adopted a method for recovering our race from that original sentence of death which would show the justice of his sentence and the unchangeableness of his decree. However, it would also permit those who were sick of sin to use their experience to return to harmony and obedience to their Creator and his just and reasonable laws and regulations. This plan is stated by the apostle in Romans 3:24-26.

Briefly, this plan provides that another man (by proving his obedience to the law of God and hence his worthiness of eternal life) might sacrifice his life and redeem the forfeited life of Adam (and of his lost posterity); it is written "in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22), and "it follows then that . . . the result of a single transgression is a condemnation which extends to the whole race" (Romans 5:18, Moffatt).

Since condemnation was upon all and since another newly created man would have been equally likely to fall, God planned the transfer of his only Son from the spiritual to the human nature. In this God was providing a man fit for sacrifice—"the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5,6). For our sakes, he who had been rich (possessing glory, honor, wisdom and power) became poor (humbling himself to a lower nature—that of a man—becoming faithful unto death) so "that we through his poverty might be made rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Redeemer's Sacrifice

To redeem man would cost the sacrifice of God's son's life as the ransom price (with all of the implied suffering and self-denial which would be necessary to bring that sacrifice to pass). To restore this life (to those who would prove worthy—"whosoever will" as stated in Revelation 22:17) would require a double exercise of God's power: first to open the prison house of death by a resurrection of the dead and second, to give to the redeemed a full opportunity to decide whether they love good or evil, righteousness or sin, truth or error. He will destroy all who love or work iniquity. He will develop and perfect those who love and choose life upon its only condition—righteousness.

Our Lord's mission at the first advent is stated by the apostle Paul. Jesus was to die for the race so that he might erase the results of Adam's transgression and secure the right to resurrect it and restore it (cf. Romans 5:6-12,16-19,21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-24). He "wills" to restore all who shall prove worthy. This period of proving who is worthy of everlasting life is his Millennial Reign (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Christ will establish righteousness in the earth through the kingdom of God. It is this kingdom which he has promised that shall be inaugurated and for which he has bidden us wait and hope. He taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

The World's Glorious Hope

Paul states that the first man (who was a sample of what the race will be when perfect) was of the earth, earthy. In the resurrection his restored posterity (with the exception of the Gospel Church) will still be earthly. That is, they will be human, adapted to the earth (1 Corinthians 15:38,44). David declares that man was made a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory, honor, dominion (Psalm 8:4-8). St. Peter, our Lord, and all the prophets since the world began declare that the human race is to be restored to that glorious perfection. Once again man is to have dominion over earth (Acts 3:19-21).

This is what God planned to give to the race. And what a glorious plan! Close your eyes to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that prevail on account of sin, and picture the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought nor an unkind look or word; love meets a kindred response in every heart and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more: not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears wiped away when they realize the resurrection work completed (Revelation 21:4).

Under the rulership of Christ as king of all nations the evil tendencies inherited from Adam and those which have come from six thousand years of degradation will be restrained by super-human wisdom, love, and power. With all men brought to a clear knowledge of the truth in its every phase all will be fairly and fully tested. Lovers of righteousness will be perfected and given control of a then perfect earth. Those who love unrighteousness when they fully understand the penalty for unrighteousness will be destroyed in the "Second Death" (Revelation 20:6) as followers of Satan. The "first" death is the destruction to which all were subjected by Adam's sin, the death from which all will be recovered by the Lord Jesus' sacrifice. The "second" death is the destruction of those who, though redeemed by Christ from the first death, shall by their willful conduct receive the penalty of death again. This death means final destruction, without hope of redemption or resurrection, for Christ dieth no more. No good reason for any further trial can be imagined. The trial granted during the Millennial Age under Christ will be thorough, fair, and a final individual trial (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Our Lord Jesus pointed out that death was the penalty against all who do not flee sin and lay hold upon the Redeemer and life-giver (Luke 13:1-5). Destruction (perishing), is the penalty of sin taught

in the Scriptures. Only by faith in the Redeemer, repentance, and reformation can the gift of God (eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord) be obtained. Whoever hears the offer of life is responsible to the extent that he understands it. According to God's promise all mankind shall, either during the Gospel Age or the Millennial Age, be brought to a clear appreciation of these conditions and privileges, with full opportunity for repentance and life.

Mankind Learning the Lesson

Calamities are temporary. Some are the result of human imperfection and lack of experience. Others result from the preparation of the earth for its Sabbath (or Millennium). During that thousand years (or "millennium") under Christ's direction earth shall be given its finishing touches and be made ready for the redeemed race. His reign shall prepare the people to properly use, enjoy, and rule the completed earth.

Man is exposed to calamities and accidents. He is not specially protected by his Creator. Man is a sinner condemned to death, he is not to be spared from death, but must be allowed to pass through it. By experience with trouble and sorrow and pain, all of which are but elements of death, mankind is learning experiences with sin which will be valuable in that kingdom. Each shall then be required to choose between good and evil. The evil they learn now; the good, and its blessed results and rewards will be displayed then— during the Millennium. Only a few profit by their lessons in this life and these are chiefly those called to the heavenly calling. The majority of humans are learning to know sin and evil. God's plan for the future of mankind is obscured from the masses. "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). With the dawning of Messiah's kingdom, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God's character will shine everywhere. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). Messiah's gracious reign, the manifestation of God's mercy, will be for the uplifting of our race. During the thousand years of Messiah's kingdom, the world will learn the desirability of righteousness, just as they now have the opportunity of learning the undesirability of sin.

But, if God's plan for redeeming the world was by the death of his son (justifying and restoring all who believe in and accept him, obeying and loving righteousness), why did not the Millennial reign of Christ with its favorable conditions and powerful restraints begin as soon as Christ had given the ransom price at Calvary? Why are those who would follow righteousness compelled to "sail through bloody seas," as the poet said, and suffer for righteousness sake? God has been calling and drawing a special class of humans. They are to be his "elect," the "bride" class that are to be joint-heirs with his son in his kingdom of glory. Christ and his bride will vanquish sin and Satan.

The Narrow Way

This special class is required to walk by faith and not by sight. They walk in the footsteps of Jesus: a narrow way (Matthew 7:14) of self-denial and opposition to the world, the flesh, and the Adversary. It seemed wise to our heavenly Father that our Lord Jesus should learn obedience through suffering and be tested in respect to his willingness to endure suffering for righteousness sake. How appropriate that the Father should make similar arrangements for the Church whom he will receive

from among the race of Adam to be members of the Royal Priesthood under Jesus, the High Priest of our order! God is preparing a Royal Priesthood for the Messianic Age. It is a priesthood that is to heal, to teach, to uplift all the willing and obedient.

During this age sin and evil have been further made use of for the discipline and preparation of the Church. Had sin not been permitted, the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus and of his Church, the reward of which is the divine nature, would have been impossible. The Revelator exclaims: “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? . . . all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:4).

Eventually, every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth shall be heard to say, “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). This will be after the reign of evil, sin, and death. The key is found in the Plan of the Ages—showing the work which each age is to accomplish and the grand eventual overthrow of evil.

To print this booklet just click "Print" on your browser's menu.

<http://www.heleadethme.org>

