

THEISM

God Works

When people acknowledge the works of God they are more likely to respect, worship and serve God. The Israelites were commanded to make the works of God known to their children, lest they forget God and refuse to walk in his law (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 78:5-11). Because the Israelites had seen the great works which God had done for them when they had journeyed through the wilderness and then conquered the land of Canaan, they served the Lord all the days of Joshua (Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7). David wanted people to sing praises to God and “say to God, ‘How awesome are Your works.’” As he recounted God’s works in Israelite history he exhorted people to “Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men. . . . He rules by His power forever” (Psalm 66:3, 5, 7). The Psalmist wanted people to behold the works of the Lord (Psalm 46:8-9) in order that they may know that “The Lord of hosts is with us” (Psalm 46:7, 11). Because God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego from the fiery furnace the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar decreed that “there is no other God who can deliver like this” (Daniel 3:28-29). After God delivered Daniel from a den of lions the Persian King Darius declared that the living God “delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth” (Daniel 6:26-27).

God’s mighty works are many and impressive. Old Testament records of God’s mighty deeds include the creation of the heavens and the earth, the destruction of the world by flood in the days of Noah, the plagues against the Egyptians, the feeding of the Israelites with manna during their wilderness journey, and the empowerment of the Israelites as they conquered and settled the land of Canaan. New Testament declarations of God’s mighty works are focused around the coming of His Son. God’s activities were made known through the births and ministries of John the baptizer and Jesus, the miracles and ministries of Jesus and His Apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the church – God’s kingdom on earth, etc. Except for the creation event, these mighty works were observed by humanity.

However, many great works of God are obscure. “As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything” (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Some of God’s works are known only because God has chosen to reveal them through his word.

God generally works quietly and invisibly among people, both great and small. “The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses” (Daniel 5:21; see also Romans 13:1). Everyone’s particular circumstances of life – whether free or slave, circumcised or uncircumcised – are as “God has distributed to each” (1 Corinthians 7:17). The work of God in people’s lives is poetically described by Hannah. “The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust; and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. . . . He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness” (1 Samuel 2:6-10).

God often works quietly and invisibly when He answers prayer. He heard and responded to the prayer of Solomon after Solomon had built a temple to the Lord (1 Kings 9:3; 2 Chronicles 7:12); of Hezekiah after he was informed that he would soon die (2 Kings 20:5); of Ezra after he had requested safety for a journey (Ezra 8:23); of Cornelius who had a vision of an angel instructing him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter (Acts 10:1-5, 31), etc. God hears the prayer of the destitute (Psalm 102:17) and of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29; 1 Peter 3:12).

God often works quietly and invisibly when He observes and judges human conduct. “If one man sins against another, God will judge him” (1 Samuel 2:25; see also Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36; Romans 2:2-3, 5; Hebrews 13:4; 2 Peter 2:9). God is the judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25; Isaiah 33:22). “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

The most significant work of God mentioned in Scripture is that of redeeming people from sin. For this reason, God “gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). In so doing, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). What Jesus did while on earth was the work of God. Jesus said, “The works which the Father has given Me to finish; the very works that I do; bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). Again he said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). He declared, “The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me” (John 10:25). When Jews took up stones to throw at Jesus, He responded, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” (John 10:32). He argued, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me” (John 10:37). Jesus himself realized the extreme importance of accomplishing the work of God when he said, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). To doubtful Jews who asked how they could do the works of God, Jesus responded, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29). The significant work of God, as Jesus said, is to cause people to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God (John 3:16; John 10:37; 8:24; 6:29).

This is also what the apostles claimed. On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter concluded his preaching by saying, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). On a later occasion he claimed, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Apostle Paul also declared “that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38), and then to those who doubted, he quoted God's statement given by the prophets, “Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you” (Isaiah 28:21; 29:14; Habakkuk 1:5; Acts 13:41). At a meeting of apostles and elders in Jerusalem, James declared God's desire that Gentiles also seek His name. He then observed that “known to God from eternity are all His works” (Acts 15:18), which seems to indicate that redemption of all humanity is the major purpose of all God's works.

But God not only works for our redemption, He also works that we might be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18), which means not only to become like Christ in His character, but also to enter into His work. After acknowledging that salvation is by grace through faith, the Apostle Paul said, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10). God gave his Son, “that He might . . . purify for Himself his own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). The saved are to work, just like God works. “We are God's fellow workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Therefore, “be . . . always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).