

What's Wrong with our Planet?

Turn to Genesis 3. What is wrong with the planet? What is wrong with planet earth? What is troubling our earth? I'm speaking on this in response to a lot of media attention to climate change and to how we might fix our environment. We will read the Bible to see what it says about this. Before we ask "what's wrong with the planet" we should answer another question:

Who's in charge of the planet?

The Bible is real clear about this. God the Creator is in charge of this planet. There is summer and winter every year because God promised Noah he would do that as long as the earth lasted. There is seedtime and harvest every year because God promised he would do that.

Psalms 104 says God gives water to the animals in our fields, and he gives water to the wild animals. God gives plants for people to cultivate and he brings food for us out of the earth. God waters the trees, and uses trees to give birds places for their nests. God makes places that are just right for mountain goats and badgers. God makes sure they all have homes.

When the lions roar, they are asked God for food, and he feeds them. *"All creatures look to you to give them food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up, when you open your hand, they are satisfied. When you hide your face they are terrified, when you take away their breath they die and return to dust"* (Ps 104). God is in charge of the planet.

We're having cold weather right now. *"God sends his command to the earth, his word runs swiftly. He spreads snow like wool and scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his words and melts them, he stirs up his breezes and water flows."* (Ps 147)

Jesus said we could trust God to take care of our food and clothing, because we can see that birds don't store up food, yet God fed them. Flowers don't work to have nice clothes, and yet they look wonderful, because God clothes them. So, says Jesus, why do you worry about clothes?

God also sends the hard things. God sends seven years of huge harvest, and then God sends seven years of no harvest at all. God can send far too many frogs. God sends far too many flies. God sends diseases that kill livestock. God sends plagues that make humans suffer. God sends terrible hail that wrecks everything. God can send far too many locusts, they eat everything that's green. There's no food left for people or animals. God sends earthquakes and volcanoes.

In a few places the OT describes God as a Warrior God going to battle. Ps 18 is a good example of this. When God goes to war, he uses what we call natural disasters: earthquakes, fire, storms, darkness, lightning, terrible winds, hailstones, tsunamis. These are God's weapons.

So, people, God is in charge of what happens on earth. Humans have done things that are bad for the land and air and water, and we are certainly right to correct that. We have not been taking good care of the earth, and the ones who work to care for earth are doing a good work.

But we're not in charge of what happens. In last year we've had heat and drought, we've had floods, and now it has been remarkably cold. God has always done such things, and he still does.

One more thing, before we talk about what's wrong with our planet. There is a lot that is right about our planet. We could talk a long time about what is good and right about our planet. A long, long, time. Let's keep that in mind. But in spite of that, something is wrong.

What's Wrong with our Planet?

The Sin of Adam and Eve

Genesis 3:17-18 *To Adam God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."*

Cursed is the ground because of you. Human sin immediately damaged the environment. The word for ground here is Hebrew *arets*. In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, *arets*. *Arets* can mean earth or land or ground. Cursed is the ground, *arets*.

The ground is corrupted somehow, and this affects plant life too. Some plants will now be a problem. Human sin quickly affected the environment, the ground itself and plant life.

A little earlier it says (Gen 3:14): *So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and above all wild animals."* Are all livestock and wild animals affected by this too? *Cursed are you above all livestock and above all wild animals.*

I did some digging around in Hebrew. It could certainly mean, "Cursed are you *more than* all livestock and *more than* all wild animals." If the writer wanted to say that the serpent was more cursed than other animals, this is how he would say it. The commentators don't like it, but that's what it sounds like.

If God was just cursing serpents, why mention livestock and wild animals at all? He would just say "The serpent is cursed." Human sin damaged the ground and affected plants, so it does not seem a big step to include animals.

Land and Animals in the Flood Story

Gen 6:6-8 - *The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

When God says at the end, "for I regret that I made them," it sounds like he's also sorry he made the animals and birds too. Could that be true? Let's keep reading.

Gen 6:11-13 -*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all flesh on earth had corrupted its ways.*

This is "earth," "arets" again. *God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all flesh on earth had corrupted its ways.* So "the earth" is separate here from "all flesh." The earth itself is corrupt, defiled, contaminated, spiritually polluted, because all flesh on earth has corrupted its ways.

The NIV uses "the human race" in v12 and v13, but in Hebrew it says "all flesh." In v7, God said he was going to destroy the human race and also all animals and birds. That's what "all flesh" is. God is sorry he made them all, the human race and the animals and birds. So when we read "all flesh" in vv12-13, we should not be thinking only humans, we should be thinking everything he listed in v7, humans and animals both. That's what "all flesh" is.

So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

All flesh had become violent and corrupt, and the earth itself, apart from people and animals, was filled with violence. God will certainly destroy people and animals and the earth itself. Humans and animals and the earth itself ruined, polluted, sin-sick, offensive to God.

You see, it was not only that first sin of Adam and Eve that brought trouble on the earth. By the time of the flood, the sin of humans at that time, their violence, ruined the human race and also ruined animals, and also ruined the earth itself. Human sin at the time of the flood increased the damage to animals and the earth itself much farther than the what Adam and Eve had done.

The animals are damaged by human sin, and clearly the earth itself has become polluted with violence.

Defiled Land, Sick Land

In Leviticus 18, Moses has given a long list of sexual sins that Israel's shall not do. Many things are included. Moses concentrated particularly on incest. Then he says this:

Leviticus 18:24-28 - *Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants... For all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.*

The Canaanites became defiled because they sinned in these ways. The Canaanites were so defiled that it spread to the land itself, the *arets*. The land was contaminated by the sin of the humans, and the land became offensive to God. God punished the land for this. (I don't know what's going on there, but that's what it says.)

And then the land vomited out its inhabitants. The land got rid of the people, because the people were making the land sick, so the land puked them out.

“That happened, Israel, because those Canaanites did these things. And Israel, if you sin in these ways, if you do these same things, the land will get sick of you and puke you out just like it did with the nations there before you. And in six or seven hundred years, that is what happened. The sins of Israel made the land sick, and it got rid of the people.

Cultures that are not shaped by western European society, simpler cultures, saw that there was a spiritual component to rivers and trees and mountains and valleys. Animals and lakes and rain and storms were all spiritual realities as well as material realities. All of creation has some kind of spiritual essence as well as physical.

And the real damage coming from humans is not our industrial waste, it is our rebellion against God and what people do to people. That is what contaminates earth, pollutes it. Human sickness is contagious, it was from the start, to land, plants, and animals.

We will look at two more Scriptures.

The heavens and the earth

Isaiah 24:4-6 - *The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.*

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes. Folks, there was no toxic waste in Isaiah's day. They had none of our industrial problems of garbage in the air and water and land. But in Isaiah's day, the earth was withering and languishing.

And even the heavens. Did you notice that? Isaiah includes the heavens in what happens to earth. Does the contamination of human sin go farther than just our planet?

What is wrong with earth? "The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed God's laws, violated God's statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant with God. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt." Human behavior, to God and to one another, is the problem.

All Creation Suffers as our Bodies Suffer

In this section of Romans, Paul reminds us about our hope in Christ, the way God will make us glorious. What's important here is that Paul says our bodies and all creation are in this together. Our bodies are in bondage to decay. We get weak, we get sick, we suffer, and we are going to die. It's going to happen. All creation joins us in all of this.

When we sinned against God, it had immediate affects on our bodies, on all human bodies, and all creation was a part of this from the very start. Earth, water, air, animals of all kinds, plants, weather, sun, moon, planets, and stars. The works. All creation, the whole world of nature, everything in nature that is not human.

Romans 8:18-23 - I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 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 freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

What's wrong with creation? It was subjected to futility, to frustration, not its own doing, but the God who cursed it because of human sin. Creation is in bondage to decay. Creation groans and labours like in pain of childbirth, right up to the present time. This is what our life is like, waiting for our redemption, and all creation is right beside us in this.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. "We know": would the Roman Christians have said, when they read this letter, that they knew that? Perhaps. But Paul is confident that once he says it, they will know what he's talking about. "Yes, Paul, you are right, we can see that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth up to the present time."

Eight hundred years before this, Isaiah could write that earth and heaven were withering and languishing because of human sin. Paul, now 2000 years ago, said the evidence was clear at that time that creation was groaning as it suffered and deteriorated. And as we long for our bodies to be renewed, so also creation longs for the same renewal, which will happen at the same time.

People, are right to take better care of our planet. In no way do I mean to say that does not matter. Let's do better, let's be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

But also understand that if we cleaned all the air and water and land today, and fixed the ozone layer today, every Scripture we've read today is still true, and all creation is still in bondage to decay, and that was clear in Rome 2000 years ago. And the reason is that the human race is sin-sick, and we have contaminated all creation by what we have done to God and to one another.

Our job is not to save our planet. Our planet is as doomed as our own bodies, and for the same reason. God has a plan to save them both, and our job is to serve the living God, and wait for his Son Jesus, who will renew all this when he returns.

But don't despair

A huge amount is right with this planet, the signs of God are all over the place every single day. There is beauty and life everywhere, and reason to thank God. The heavens still declare the glory of God, and visible creation still tells us the important things about our great God.

This cold weather shows us that God does what he wants. Cold and ice and snow and clouds and stormy winds still do God's bidding, just like in Psalm 148.

God told Noah that as long as earth lasted, there would be summer and winter. There would be seedtime and harvest. That is not just spring and fall, "seedtime and harvest" means the earth will produce food every year. And there will be day and night. Every evening, and every morning, God keeps his Noah promise. Because: God still decides every day what's going to happen, and how this will go. We are in his hands. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, you are the Maker and Sustainer of heaven and earth. Guide us to live well with what you have given. Thank you for your care, and thank you for providing for us from the earth. Thank you for giving us this beautiful place, and for all your glory still shines through all of us. We trust in you to care for us, and to see us through. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.