

# **NATURE - GOD'S GROANING CREATION**

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

### **PROLOGUE: ENVIRONMENT STEWARDSHIP FROM A BIBLICAL WORLD-VIEW**

Scripture provides us with God's perspective on the creation, our relationship to it, our mandate to use it and our stewardship of it. We must learn to take God at his word, not try to force the Scriptures to comply with today's popular scientific theories. An understanding of what God has told us in the Bible concerning nature can provide a fresh perspective on the present environmental debate about "saving the planet."

## **PART I - OUR SITUATION**

### **CHAPTER 1 FEARFULNESS ABOUT THE FUTURE**

Perspectives about our relationship to nature range from calling it a limitless commodity to our mother, from a renewable resource to an organism in which we are a cell. There is concern about the deteriorating condition of our environment. Many feel that the threat of a global catastrophe can be avoided, if through proper education and financial security we can make people behave in a responsible way. We are hoping that our technology will provide a miracle cure. Such solutions are inadequate because they only treat the symptoms, as though our problems will go away on their own like a cold. Since our corrupted hearts are the source of the problem, such a misplaced world view will lead to the wrong solutions.

### **CHAPTER 2 WHAT CAN WE DEPEND ON?**

We have grown accustomed to the idea that humanity can solve all its problems through human intellect and social programs, yet there is always some unknown threat that we fear: war, crime, pollution or disease. Can people work together to solve these things as the world advances to a better state, or are things decaying under the curse and the laws of entropy? Many in the Church accept modern theories of origins which were constructed to omit God, even though these deny God's explanations of reality. Good science has always confirmed a sound interpretation of Scripture, otherwise it would mean that God was not infallible. The Bible is not merely the myths of the uneducated. Yet, rather than being a people of faith, we prefer to live by what we see.

### **CHAPTER 3 SCIENCE'S LIMITATIONS**

Science is about mankind's desire to understand what God has already engineered and assembled in nature. But we make the mistake of assuming that the world can be understood simply through its mechanicalness. Faith in science has caused us to think we have mastered our own fate. We expect science to provide a miracle cure. Instead, our trial and error approach to the growth of technology has accelerated the deterioration of our environment.

Beware of the false hope offered by those who speak in the name of science, but deny God. We like to think the best of ourselves, that man's heart is basically good. But even those who do not believe in God are seeing that, left unchecked, man will cause the destruction of nature. Our problem is not just a lack of knowledge. We cannot possibly understand all of nature's workings without insight from outside of nature.

## **CHAPTER 4 THE IMPACT OF OUR CHOICES**

Those with no bread on the table are more concerned about meeting their immediate needs than long-term planning. Once a society achieves a surplus, it then starts to protect its resources. So why do we still abuse the environment? Our expectation is that each generation will surpass its parents' standard of living. This assumes a growing economy and expanding technology. We ignore the fact that the world will not indefinitely sustain growth. How are we to balance our freedom to use the resources we have been given, with our role as caretakers of another's possessions? The earth is defiled through our disobeying the Creator's laws. That is why people and nature must bear the consequences of man's behavior.

## **CHAPTER 5 THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WEALTH**

God is concerned about the cleanliness of the heart more than the cleanliness of the body. The Bible says give everything you have to the poor, but it also says there is nothing wrong with material possessions if they are received and used with gratefulness to the Giver. One who has been entrusted with much must be willing to contribute to the needs of others. Instead, we consider ourselves free to use our possessions however we want. We see our inheritance as a windfall, and so misuse the resources of the earth. Like the prodigal son, we are spending our inheritance and will have nothing to show for it. People wonder whether Christianity has any relevance in the environmental crisis. We need to show them the Father who is waiting to receive them back in repentance.

## **CHAPTER 6 THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR STEWARDSHIP**

There is a growing urgency that we must "save the planet" because it is the only home we have. We want to feel that we are doing something to help change the destructive habits of our culture, yet we do not understand the cause of the problem. The original "good" creation was impaired as a consequence of our own irresponsible behavior. The Bible indicates the suffering we experience is often directly a result of the wrong choices that people are actively making. We are experiencing the pain of being disciplined. It requires a changed heart to implement a true change in behavior. We feel so helpless to change things. The Bible tells us to not be dismayed, none of what we see around us is outside of God's control.

# **PART II - A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE**

## **CHAPTER 7 A GEOLOGIST CONSIDERS GENESIS**

What logic can a scientist use to balance the apparent conflicts between science and Bible? Could forces from outside the physical universe affect this world? Is the Creator now merely a spectator? Is the world just an endless balance between good and evil forces? Is God creating through "survival of the fittest?" Is the "Gap Theory" consistent with geologic theories and biblical inerrancy? Are all these just compromises? The Bible is the truth given to us by God to teach us things that we are otherwise unable to discern on our own. The primary issue is not good science and bad science, but the perspective of your world view. The harsh climates we experience here could not have been part of the original creation, unless you assume that the destructive forces of nature were present in the "good" garden which God gave to his innocent children. Compromising on the biblical account of creation undermines every other claim the Church makes.

**CHAPTER 8 CHOOSING YOUR PRIORITIES**

The "balance of nature" that we see today seems right because it is all we have ever known. We assume that God sees it as we do. Instead we should try to understand what God has already said on the subject. Not everything in nature is part of the "good" creation, since Jesus, the Maker of all things, referred to snakes, wolves and weeds when illustrating corruption. Our culture has the attitude that there are no absolutes. If we expect that people will behave ethically toward the environment, then we are assuming that there are moral absolutes. So then how are we to determine the rules of right and wrong? God does not treat us as our actions deserve. Yet, despite our being corrected, we further provoke God by turning our backs on him.

**CHAPTER 9 A DISTORTED WORLD**

People think this world is a nurturing place, but nature sustains itself at great cost to its participants. Our image of God is distorted when we picture fear and death as part of the "good" creation. The Bible does not teach that death has always been a part of this world. In the beginning God gave the beasts every green plant as their food, not each other. This is not obvious from viewing nature. It is the Scriptures and not nature that reveals this reality. It is wishful nostalgia to think that man's heart is pure and the Indians lived softly on the land as part of nature. We do not understand what it means to take care of the earth.

**CHAPTER 10 WHY DOES GOD ALLOW ...?**

Why is there pain and suffering in the world around us? God will not allow us to remain immature children. Like Jesus, we learn obedience from what we suffer. God uses his creation as a tool. We overcome our fear of life's storms as we learn to place our faith in God's care for us. God is willing to allow harm to his creation for this purpose. We fear that the things being done to the earth will impair God's ability to provide our daily needs. Like ungrateful children, we do not appreciate that God is showing patience toward our openly rebellious behavior as he encourages us to change.

**CHAPTER 11 WE ARE BEING DISCIPLINED**

If there is a good God why must innocent people suffer? In God's eyes we are all guilty of rebellion. Since childhood we have been looking over our shoulders to see if we will get caught. In giving us free will, God also allows us to live with the consequences of our foolish choices. Still, God rescues us out of adversity to remind us of our dependence on him. If we had never been in need, we would be unaware that God our Father is protecting and sustaining us. But too often we deny that God exists because he is not as gentle as we had expected. We worry and live fearful lives because we don't remember how God has provided for us in the past.

**CHAPTER 12 WHY MUST THE CREATION SUFFER?**

Why does nature have to bear the burden if it was the humans that fell? God is limiting the blessing and fruitfulness he provides us, to point people back toward him. Nature is God's tool for teaching his children. A price had to be paid for our disobedience. The creation groans under its burden to show us the scars our behavior has caused. The fact that we abhor seeing suffering and death in nature points us to the atonement by Christ in our place.

**CHAPTER 13 GLIMPSES OF EDEN**

Do not be deceived into thinking that anything we can do will restore this world into a utopia. Life is not a peaceful co-existence with nature. The "balance" of nature is predator stalking and killing prey. God has allowed this affliction into the world. Some say we want to feel like a part of nature again, but the reason we feel concerned is actually

because these creatures were once under our custody as caretakers of the creation. The Christian idea of man having dominion over nature seems arrogant to the world. Nature is an innocent victim suffering because it dwells beside fallen man.

#### **CHAPTER 14            THE SILENCING OF NATURE'S SONG**

Satan's defacing of the creation caused its capacity to praise God to be diminished. Even in its fallen condition, nature makes music to God and for God, by displaying his ability and wisdom. There is a frustration being pent-up in all of nature as a result of the inability to properly fulfill its purpose. When its redemption is put into place, the whole of creation will burst into jubilant song.

People desire to create better ways of honoring God, which is disobedient to the clear instructions we have been given. We develop a distorted image of who God is and begin to worship created things rather than the Creator. As we continue to act as steward of the creation without the wisdom and ability we were meant to use, each day nature has less capacity to give God joy or cause him to be praised.

### **PART III - THE DESIRED RESPONSE**

#### **CHAPTER 15            WE ARE THE POLLUTION**

Our ecological problems are a spiritual issue. "We" defile this world, not something outside of us. The real pollution is flowing out of our rebellious hearts. Yet we do not seek forgiveness, we seek to "like" ourselves. Paul stresses our responsible use of our own bodies, rather than our responsible use of the creation. Instead we regulate the handling of chemicals but fight to have fewer restrictions on compliance with God's commands as though it had no impact on the environment. We expect that there are no consequences to our behavior. God has allowed all these disasters to come upon us, yet we have not changed our ways or sought his forgiveness.

#### **CHAPTER 16            HOW TO RESTORE WHAT WAS LOST?**

The Bible warns us that scoffers will come who deliberately forget God's own version of the creation and replace it with destructive stories they have made up. The concept of being made "in the image of God" has been replaced by being made in the image of animals.

We think we are doing God such a favor in trying to "save" this planet. We are too easily persuaded by the wisdom of our age and too quick to forget what God has done in the past. Jesus has power over nature to restore the lame and the results of our poor stewardship. But if God were to restore nature today, fallen men would only defile it once again.

#### **CHAPTER 17            WHAT ARE WE TO DO?**

Christians appear to be absent from those who are concerned about the effects of our industrial society and so have become irrelevant to the modern world. God does have something to say about the degrading of his creation, but most Christians addressing the issues sound no different than their secular counterparts. Scriptural authority is not being presented. We have discarded the parts of the Bible that our culture finds unacceptable. We have forgotten that in the past God disciplined the nations through climate changes. We will not be able to "save the planet" by our own ability and political activism. We are called to humble ourselves and pray. Then God will heal the land.

## **CHAPTER 18            THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S INTERVENING**

God takes pride in showing himself powerful on behalf of those who will trust him. He allows us to live with the consequences of our choices so we will learn to see our own inability. God is not distraught, as though he has lost his control over the creation. But still we hesitate to put the environmental crisis in God's hands, doubting that he can help with these problems. People prefer to trust a beneficial, but somewhat powerless Mother Nature and worry how to save our elderly mother. We must recognize that our rebellion against God is part of the problem. God provided a Savior, because we have made such an awful mess of things.

## **CHAPTER 19            THE SOLUTION**

When God's laws are disregarded the result is affliction. This is to prevent our disobedience from being so deceptively appealing. Though in our hearts we know we are guilty, we claim to be victims and deny that we are responsible. It is hard for us to admit that we cannot fix what we have broken. We are sure that with a little more knowledge the "good" in man will come out. We turn to God only as a last resort. We must realize that we cannot depend on our technology. We will cease to be anxious only when we accept that we are the source of the problem and seek God. God is in total control of the environment. Everything is going according to plan.

## **CHAPTER 20            A GLIMPSE OF THE EARTH'S FUTURE**

Many scientists are trying to predict the future, but the only dependable source of information on the subject is the Word of God. Even then, we see only a poor reflection of what will come. There is much that we do not understand about what is to come. When the elements are destroyed by fire, will it be a purification or a destruction? Will the earth be restored or the elements of the universe be destroyed? Both are true. There are many passages describing how creation is awaiting the restoration of nature, when the lion lies down with the lamb during the millennial reign of Christ.

## **CHAPTER 21            A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN**

Is heaven really just Eden without the potential for temptation, or is it something more? Could we say about Eden that "no eye has seen what God has prepared for those love him?" Jesus made it clear that this earth is not the "promised land" of heaven. When God's purposes for the creation are accomplished this universe will pass away. There will be no more sun or sea and we will all be changed. Heaven will be a place prepared by the one who gives you all good things.

## **EPILOGUE**

This decaying world causes people to question whether there is a God. They accuse the Church of neglecting the creation. Even if it is not eternal, we are its stewards. The fact that we consider this temporal world to be disposable is a sign that we do not understand our biblical stewardship. Without an accurate world view how can we judge which fears to respond to and which fears to just calm with a proper interpretation of the facts. We need to remember that God has promised that if we turn to him he will not abandon us.