



"Adversity is like a strong wind. It tears away from us all but the things that cannot be torn, so that we see ourselves as we really are."

—Arthur Golden

**26-Jul-02**

## **Drought and Fire**

A few weeks have passed since the wall-to-wall coverage of the devastating fires in Colorado and Arizona. Another fire presently blazes precariously close to 1,500-year-old sequoias in northern California. Many areas of the country are under wildfire watches because of hot, dry weather and extended drought. Even over the Independence Day holiday, fire officials warned citizens not to set off fireworks because of the danger of catching the woods on fire.

It is estimated that 40 percent of America suffers from drought conditions, and some of these places—particularly the South—have been unusually dry since the summer of 1998. Brad Rippey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture writes in his "Drought Overview" for July 18, 2002:

Current impacts across the country rival some of the most formidable droughts of the last century. According to the National Climatic Data Center, more than one-third (about 36 percent) of the contiguous U.S. was in severe to extreme drought, based on the Palmer Drought Index, at the end of June 2002. This is comparable

to the size and duration of the drought that peaked across the U.S. during the summer of 1988, but only the Dust Bowl 1930s and the Drought of the 1950s stand out as more significant, national-scale droughts since the beginning of the 20th century. (See his "U.S. Drought Monitor" for a graphic of drought conditions.)

The U.S. Seasonal Outlook through October 2002 is not very encouraging. According to this report, the South will see the best chance for returning to normal conditions, while the Western Plains will experience short-term improvement. However, the Mid-Atlantic and Rocky Mountain regions will remain static or worsen, and the Northeast will enter drought conditions. Certain areas of North and South Carolina, among the states hardest hit by drought, need 12-15 inches of rain to bring precipitation levels back to near normal. These predictions bode ill for the nation's agriculture and forestlands.

For instance, Arizona lies near the drought's heart in the West. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman declared the whole state a drought disaster area in May because of some of the worst drought conditions in a century. Arizona farmers may lose 60 to 90 percent of their crops in 2002, depending on what they grow and where they grow it. Ranchers have been forced to reduce their herds 20 percent because of the drought, driving beef prices to new lows.

As for forestlands, June through early July saw massive fires mainly in the West. The Hayman fire in Colorado's Pike National Forest destroyed 137,760 acres and 600 structures, making it the worst wildfire in that state's history. In central Arizona, the 85,000-acre Rodeo fire, already the worst in Arizona's history, merged with the Chediski fire to destroy 468,638 acres and more than 400 structures. Large wildfires also burned in Alaska, southern California, New Mexico, Utah, and Georgia. Along with the drought, foolish forest-management practices—leaving too much old growth, known to firefighters as "fuel"—are receiving blame for a fire season comparable to the record-breaking 2000 fire season.

The Bible is not silent on drought—in fact, it is very clear in its attribution of drought to God's judgment for disobedience. For instance, [God](#) says in [Leviticus 26:18-20](#): "And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. . . . I will make your heavens like

iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit."

God also speaks through Amos about His reactions to Israel's backsliding, a type of what will happen in the end time:

I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me. ([Amos 4:7-8](#))

Though we cannot say that every dry spell is a curse from God, we would be foolish to think that none of them are. When natural disasters strike, it is prudent policy to take the time to evaluate our personal relationship with God, and if necessary, return to Him. Perhaps then "the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" ([Amos 5:15](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Rain](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Weather is an element that factors in the prophecies of Revelation. The biblical image of rain derives from the desert climate of the Middle East. Israel, unlike Egypt, is dependent primarily upon the rains that fall. Israel has only two seasons: rainy (October through April comprising early and latter rains) and dry (May through September). In contrast to the labor intensive irrigation systems of Egypt, Israel depended on God to bring abundant rain. Using rain, or lack thereof, as a carrot or a stick, God trained His people. God is, and has always been, in control of the weather patterns. Climate change does not take place without God's involvement, and these changes do

not outstrip mankind's adaptation capabilities. Weather disasters expose the moral weaknesses of the Israelites. We need to patiently and obediently wait for the early and latter rains that God will provide.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Your Land Shall Not Yield Its Produce](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Modern Israel is heavily dependent on its ability to produce food, but recent reports reveal just how unstable agriculture is. Bible prophecy predicts that famine will be part of the end-time scenario.

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