

## The 'Exceptional' 2007 Drought

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The American Southeast should not look as it does. Rows of cypress trees lining the streets are dead and brown. Lawns, which should be a brilliant green, are dry and withered. Streams, ponds, and lakes are all down several feet from their normal water levels. The clear, blue sky, once so beautiful in forecasting a bright, sunny day, has become unwelcome all across the parched South, from Alabama and Tennessee, through Georgia, to North and South Carolina. Parts of all five of these states are experiencing what the U.S. Drought Monitor calls a D4 or "exceptional" drought.

The Drought Monitor's producers—a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center, the National Climatic Data Center, and the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska Lincoln—describe D4 drought conditions as "exceptional and widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies." It is the most intense category of drought—expected only once every one hundred years—and obviously the most difficult from which to recover. A "normal" amount of rainfall in subsequent years will not refill reservoirs and water tables to pre-drought levels.

Northern Georgia lies in the center of the exceptional drought area. In late August, 70 of the state's 159 counties were under the exceptional condition, and with continued hot and dry weather, additional counties are expected to be added to the list. According to the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences:

Soil moisture is near the 1st percentile across most of west and north Georgia. At this level, we would expect the soil to be moister in 99 of 100 years. Most streams across west and north Georgia are at or near record low flows for late August. The Chattooga River in the northeast mountains is approaching an all-time record low flow. The stream gage data for the Chattooga goes back 67 years.

In the next few months, "the best hope"—the University's term—for relief from the dire drought is from tropical weather systems, that is, tropical storms or hurricanes. Absent such an event or two, the outlook for the fall and winter is grim. In addition, long-range forecasts predict a drier, warmer winter for the U.S. Southeast.

Lake Lanier, the main reservoir for the city of Atlanta and its five million area residents, has received national media attention, both for its record low levels and the fact that it also supplies water to northern Florida, where certain endangered mussel species and sturgeon face a heightened threat due to the water scarcity. By law, Georgia must release 3.2 billion gallons of water per day downstream to fill Florida's hydroelectric needs as well as to preserve its wildlife.

Georgia Governor Sonny Purdue argues that, since water supplies have slipped under the three-month threshold, water outflows from Georgia need to be reduced, and Florida counties should place businesses and residents under water restrictions. The well-being of people, he declares, should take precedence over endangered fish. His point becomes even weightier, if, as it is expected, the director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Carol Couch, recommends tightened water restrictions for the Atlanta area, which may include mandatory cutbacks on commercial and

industrial users. If they are implemented, these water restrictions would be the most severe in the history of U.S. metropolitan areas.

Biblically, drought has long been seen as a sign of God's displeasure with His people. Both of the "blessing and cursing" chapters (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) include drought among the curses for disobedience. For example, 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. (See Deuteronomy 28:23-24.)

Amos 4:6-8 illustrates God's use of drought—and the resulting famine—as a prod to induce repentance, a method of persuasion that Israel rarely heeded:

"Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord. "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 . . . yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord.

In this modern, scientific age, we tend to consider droughts like the current one to be merely extremes of the meteorological cycle. Yet, God is sovereign over His creation, and He is still at work among the descendants of His people Israel. With its extensive exposure to Christian principles, the modern nations of Israel should know what God expects of them in their conduct, but America, Britain, Canada, Australia, and the other Israelite countries have increasingly ignored God and His way. As a result, their cultures have become secular, greedy, and self-indulgent.

It should be no wonder, then, that such a broad swath of the United States is experiencing this exceptional drought. Will the citizens of America's Bible Belt return to God? If not, what worse disasters can be expected in the future?