

' . . . And Not A Drop To Drink'

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Speaking of Judah in the end time, the Eternal prophesies through Ezekiel:

They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity. (Ezekiel 4:16-17)

Jesus specifically names famine as one of the signs of the end (Matthew 24:7). Scripture shows that Israel and the rest of the world will suffer famine due to sin (Ezekiel 5:7, 16-17).

Obviously, a key element of famine is water scarcity. Not until recently have spiraling human demands for water begun to outgrow the capacity of the earth's natural systems. The demands of our generation worldwide now exceed the sustainable yield of the earth's aquifers. At current levels of consumption, underground water tables are now falling in the U.S. Southwest and Great Plains, in several states in India, in much of northern China, across north Africa, in southern Europe and throughout the Middle East.

The impact of water scarcity worldwide is immeasurable! It threatens food production, environmental balance and social and political stability. Water promises to be a fulcrum on which the world's fate hangs.

Food Production

Water has always been a crucial requirement of life. Having no substitutes, it is indispensable to food production. Worldwide, agriculture uses about 65 percent of all the water removed from rivers, lakes, and aquifers, compared with 25 percent for industries and 10 percent for households and municipalities. Depending on its severity, the lack of water will begin to slow or halt food production in short order.

When droughts strike, governments typically favor urban residents over farms when rationing scarce supplies. This tactic ultimately backfires when farmers must cut food production or their crops fail as a result of insufficient irrigation. In addition, by heavily subsidizing water prices, governments give out the false message to consumers that it is abundant and we can afford to waste it.

An equally serious menace to life is water that has been polluted or rendered undrinkable. Though opinions differ on the acceptable level of quality, nevertheless, most experts believe that the present quality of our drinking water is unfit for human consumption. Researchers have found serious bacterial contaminants such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia* in 40 percent of the treated drinking water in the United States.

As water tables drop, the resource becomes too costly to continue pumping, too salty to irrigate crops as it is pulled from greater depths, or it simply runs out altogether. In Israel, decades of over-pumping have caused seawater to invade the nation's coastal aquifer, a key freshwater source. Israel's water officials predict that they may need to close 20 percent of coastal wells within a few years. More than

10 percent of the irrigated area of the world appears to suffer from salt buildup serious enough to lower crop yields.

Man toils to grow food with irrigation, but God blesses obedience with rainfall (Deuteronomy 11:10-11), giving rain in due season. To compensate for the lack of God's blessing of rainfall due to sin, man has reasoned that increased irrigation will solve all his agricultural problems. As a result, he has seriously harmed his environment and with it his ability to grow food.

Environmental Balance

According to the World Resources Database in Washington, D.C., global water use has more than tripled since 1950. Around the world, there are roughly 38,000 dams (higher than 15 meters), more than 85 percent of which were built during the last 35 years. The effect on upstream areas has been devastating. These areas suffer from such impacts as flooding, permanent relocation of people, animals and birds, and destructive increased water flow velocity. Conversely, the dramatic decrease in water has put farmers and fisherman downstream out of business, and whole towns have dried up.

Man has long endeavored to control water. Hezekiah "made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city" (II Kings 20:20). Many rivers now resemble elaborate plumbing works, with the timing and amount of flow completely controlled, like water from a faucet, to maximize the rivers' benefits for humans. Regarding the vanity of such great accomplishments, Solomon explains:

I made myself waterpools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:6, 11)

Solomon must have learned his lesson, for he says in Proverbs 21:1, ". . . like the rivers of water; [God] turns it wherever He wishes." Only God truly controls the rivers.

When human beings take things into their own hands, they become vain and presumptuous. But while modern engineering has been remarkably successful in getting water to people and farms when and where they need it, it has failed to protect the basic ecological functions of rivers and aquatic systems. On the Arabian peninsula, to give one example, 75 percent of groundwater used on crops is not just over-drafted, it is non-renewable. Trapped underground thousands of years ago, this water is not replenished by rainfall.

The consequences of this failure are just beginning to become clear—from degraded river deltas and species on the brink of extinction to shrinking inland lakes and disappearing wetlands. For instance, according to the book *State of the World 1996*, "[California] has lost 95 percent of its wetlands, and populations of migratory birds and waterfowl, which depend on such areas for food and habitat, have dropped from 60 million around 1950 to just 3 million today." The Wildlife Society in Washington, D.C., reports, "The amount of wetlands lost between the 1780s and the 1980s globally averaged more than 60 acres an hour for every hour of those 200 years." This comprises an area of 105,120,000 acres or 164,250 square miles, a region slightly larger than California!

The Psalmist writes:

He sends the springs into the valleys, which flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. (Psalm 104:10-13)

It is the Creator who blesses the earth with water according to our obedience. All the ways of humanity are contrary to God's way, and we see man's way in the abuse and destruction of the earth resulting from misuse of the earth's resources. God says in Revelation that He will "destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

Social and Political Stability

There is an emerging trend regarding water scarcity that is likely to shape world affairs in the near future. While water tables are falling and rivers are drying up, competition for dwindling supplies is increasing. Isaiah records the Eternal's words regarding His control of the earth's water resources, "Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst" (Isaiah 50:2).

Claims on rivers by some countries are also becoming excessive, draining some rivers dry before they reach the sea. Three hundred Chinese cities are now short of water. China's Yellow River often runs dry before it gets to the Yellow Sea. Similarly, the Colorado River rarely makes it to the Gulf of California.

Conflicts over shared river systems are intensifying. Bangladesh is protesting India's excessive use of the Ganges, which leaves all too little for Bangladesh to irrigate its cropland. Israel and Palestine are spending endless weeks negotiating over the allocation of shared water resources. Conflicts among central Asian countries over the waters of the Amu Dar'ya and Syr Dar'ya are intensifying as population pressures build to the point where demand exceeds the sustainable yield of the rivers. The United States and Mexico compete for the waters of the Rio Grande.

Water has always been scarce in the Middle East. With regard to physical survival, nothing is more serious than the absence of water (I Kings 17:1; Jeremiah 14:3; Joel 1:20; Haggai 1:11). Before 1967, modern Israel, though relatively more powerful than its immediate neighbors, was in an awkward and futile position regarding water and felt its interests were at risk. Syrian attempts to divert the Baniyas, one of three sources of the upper Jordan River, contributed to rising tensions and a series of armed confrontations with Israel immediately preceding the Six Day War in 1967. Israel's victory in that conflict included gaining control over two areas of strategic water importance—the West Bank aquifer and the Golan Heights, which feeds the Baniyas into the Jordan and provides access to the site of an intended Jordanian dam on the Yarmouk River.

Regarding future water resource planning, Klaus Lampe, general director of the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, warns: "Thoughtlessness and ignorance regarding tomorrow's food supply are among the most dangerous of the many factors influencing our political, economic and environmental systems." As a result of water shortages, we will see a dramatic increase in wars

over the more than 3,000 major rivers that mark or cross international borders. The day will come, according to Ezekiel, when all the rivers of Israel will become the plunder of the surrounding nations (Ezekiel 36:4).

"Water of Affliction"

The sins of humanity have brought upon this world a plethora of problems that are unsolvable by man's methods. These problems have become overwhelming and will soon contribute to the decimation of man on earth. God warns Israel in Leviticus 18:26, 28, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments . . . lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it." This principle certainly holds true for the entire world.

In Deuteronomy 28 God promises to curse Israel for disobedience to His commandments. He will withhold rain, causing drought and famine (verses 23-24). God says lack of water is a result of sin:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

In ancient Israel the phrase "water of affliction" (I Kings 22:27; Isaiah 30:20) could fittingly be used under conditions when water had to be rationed (Lamentations 5:4; Ezekiel 4:11, 16). The context, however, usually suggests punishment for sin (see Lamentations 5:16; Ezekiel 4:17).

Obedience to God is the only way to ensure that we live in a world where rain falls as needed for the health of agriculture, the environment and people. To the obedient, God promises, "I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezekiel 34:26). God promises through Isaiah:

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58:11)