

Are We Cursing Our Land?

Today we have severe drought in some areas—unexpected floods in others. It has not always been this way. Why the change? Read who is responsible!

by J. W. Robinson

LARGE portions of the United States, Australia, South Africa, which were once productive, are now drought stricken or ravaged by floods. Streams and springs are drying up in many areas! Much of the topsoil is eroding. Hurricanes are sweeping inland farther, and with greater frequency, than ever before!

Why all this distress? Is it a *naturally caused* situation which can be explained away? OR IS IT PUNISHMENT FOR SIN?

If it is punishment, for whose sin are YOU being punished?

Here certainly is a question not only our brethren on the farm need to understand, but all of us everywhere!

Why Climatic Rampage?

Here is the answer—

When God gave Israel the law in Mount Sinai, He told them to cultivate the land and harvest its fruit for six years (Ex. 23:10-11). But He also included this little-known, though vitally important statute: *"the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still . . . In like manner shall you deal with your vineyard and your oliveyard."*

God made this law a part of His overall law of love. He knows that the land needs a rest every seventh year.

God did not say, "Do it if you want to." He made it a definite command for our own good!

But why the increase in floods, in drought, in blowing topsoil and in tornadoes? And why the coming war and captivity of this whole people? What have the people done to merit such devastation?

Let Leviticus 26:34-35 tell us. "Then [in the near future] shall the land enjoy her sabbaths AS LONG AS IT LIES DESOLATE, and you be in your enemies' land; then shall the land rest, AND ENJOY HER SABBATHS. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest; BECAUSE IT DID NOT REST IN YOUR SABBATHS, WHEN YOU DWELT UPON IT."

It is all very clear. The land becomes desolate because it has not been allowed to rest and keep its sabbaths!

Some who call themselves Christians show a great lack of concern for God's sabbatical year. Does that show an attitude of SUBMISSION? No, it typifies the indifference of this modern age!

Don't think for a minute that you are on a band wagon with an easy ticket

into the Kingdom of God. *You must OBEY God!* Otherwise you will suffer with the nation when it pays in full for its sins.

In the Scriptures God isn't speaking just to your neighbor. *HE is speaking to YOU!*

God's Conditional Promises

Are you occasionally plagued by disease among your livestock, by insect pest, or by drought? If so, you may have been neglecting to DESERVE God's promised blessings. God promises the obedient that He will ". . . satisfy your soul in drought . . . and you shall be like an irrigated garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa. 58:11).

God commands us, in Exodus 23:25-26, "And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land."

Again, in II Chronicles 7:13-14 God promised us, "When I shut up the heavens that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people [Christians today] who are called by My name HUMBLE THEMSELVES and PRAY and SEEK My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and HEAL their land."

There it is! God's people must obey God—and that includes the keeping of the sabbath year. Now is the time we need to learn to PRAY for one another, "Casting all your cares upon Him; for He cares for you" (I Pet. 5:7).

Punishment for Disobedience

Notice what happened once before when the people refused to obey this law. We have a record of this in II Chronicles 36:20-21: "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he [Nebuchadnezzar] away to Babylon; where they were servants of him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: to fulfill the Word of the Eternal by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she [the land] lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years." Every sabbatical year unkept meant a year in captivity for Judah! God's cor-

rective measures are sure—Israel, too, will be desolate and the land will soon enjoy her sabbaths because the people refuse to turn to God and keep His sabbatical years.

God warned Israel in Leviticus 26:14-35 what would happen if they disobeyed this law. Israel was to receive severe punishments in four progressively worsening stages unless the nation repented.

Some have thought this prophecy applies only to Israel's first punishment, and isn't for us today. They quote verse 22: "I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you FEW in number; and your ways [roads] shall be desolate."

Those who are scoffers will say, "That is no concern of ours: there are not enough wild beasts in this nation to do any serious damage." Don't you believe it! We are already getting a foretaste of this condition. Rabies and other diseases that are spread by animals are becoming increasingly more destructive, especially to our children. A typical report which illustrates this point is the following news item from Toronto, Ontario, Canada: "Red foxes are bringing an epidemic of rabies into heavily populated southern Ontario . . . School children in Grey County recently began carrying clubs while waiting for school buses after one girl drove off an attacking fox . . . Anti-rabies vaccine has been given to 400 persons so far this year, compared to 200 for all 1957 . . . Cattle have been hit by the disease" (quoted from the *Dallas Times Herald*, Nov. 1, 1958).

Besides the rabies that is being spread far and wide by foxes, skunks, mice, bats, and dogs, there are many more diseases that are bringing great destruction to our children and cattle. Diseases, however, are not the only source of trouble from animals. Man has so abused his natural surroundings that wildlife populations and their food supplies are becoming unbalanced. When a species becomes too numerous, or its natural food supply runs low, it is likely to cause abnormal destruction due to sheer hunger madness. Consider the following report from TRUE MAGAZINE, March, 1960:

"There are twice as many rats in the world as people—about five billion (400

million rats in the U. S.). *Every 12th farm in the world produces food only to feed rats; a total of about two million average sized modern farm! . . .* Wild animals are destined to become even more destructive *throughout* the world because men have severely abused the land.

How to Keep the Sabbath Year

We know that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in RIGHTEOUSNESS" (II Tim. 3:16). We know also that we are *commanded* to keep the sabbath year and that "all {God's} commandments are RIGHTEOUSNESS (Ps. 119:172)." Therefore let us look into the Scriptures for instruction in the keeping of the sabbath year.

God's instructions, in Leviticus 25: 3-7, for the sabbath year are very thorough and complete and are easily understood. [I quote from the Moffatt translation here because it is more easily understood than is the King James Version. The meaning, however, is identical in both].

"For six years you may sow your field, for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in the produce; but the seventh year shall be a sabbath of *entire* rest FOR THE LAND, a sabbath in honor of the Eternal, on which you must neither sow a field nor prune a vineyard, on which you must not even gather the aftergrowth of your harvest nor grapes from your undressed vines . . . it shall be a year of *entire* rest FOR THE LAND, a sabbath in honor of the Eternal, on which you must neither sow a field nor prune a vineyard, on which you must not even gather the aftergrowth of your harvest nor grapes from your undressed vines . . . it shall be a year of *entire* rest FOR THE LAND. The *natural* produce of the land shall serve as food for you, for yourself and your slaves, male and female, for your hired servant and any outsiders staying with you, furnishing food also for your cattle and livestock!

Read these verses again very carefully. They are important. Notice that the sabbatical year is a year of *entire* rest FOR THE LAND. Verse five tells you that you must not gather your crops or fruit for commercial use or to store up in that year. They must, in general, be allowed to return to the soil. Yet verse six tells you that the *natural* produce of the land—that which grows voluntarily—in the sabbatical year shall serve as food for you, your servants, and strangers or guests that are with you.

Some people are temporarily confused when reading these two verses, thinking they contradict. But actually they do not.

You must not harvest the produce of the land in order to sell it. Neither are you to store up the produce of the sabbath year for future use. You may use the voluntary produce for day-to-day needs. God wants you to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season, even in the sabbath year.

The natural produce of the land in that year will also furnish food for your cattle and other livestock which may graze on the land (verse 7). This clearly shows that it is permissible to allow cattle to graze the fields in addition to the pasture in the sabbath year. To take advantage of this liberty it is permissible to allow your cattle herd to increase while they are grazing the whole farm. One man, *who did not study these scriptures*, mistakenly assumed he should sell all of his cattle the sabbath year!

Definite proof that we should not plant a garden in our sabbatical year, nor harvest or can its produce, is found in Leviticus 25:20-21: "And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow nor gather in our increase . . ." Notice that God is making provision for those who will be concerned about what they are going to eat during the year in which their land is resting. If we could plant a vegetable garden in the sabbatical year, no one would wonder where his food is coming from, because a well-managed garden can be depended upon to provide an abundance of fresh food. Under such a condition, there would be no test of the faith of the individual.

God's Blessings Promised

Some are sure to say, "How can we make a living in the sabbath year? A little fresh fruit and vegetables will not support my family. I need a cash crop. *I think* God wants us to use our minds and learn to draw our own conclusions; and *I think* we should let one-seventh of the farm lie idle each year." This looks good to the natural reasoning of some people, but *what does God say about it?*

God *does* want you to use your minds. And if you use them properly, you will come to the conclusion that *everyone* must learn God's point of view and live by it. The only other recourse is to follow human reasoning, independent of the Scriptures, which leads only to heartaches, sorrows, and wretchedness. Therefore, let us turn to God's Word so that He will tell us *how* to keep the sabbath year.

God tells us in Leviticus 25:20-22, "And if you shall say, 'What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase.' Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year; and it shall bring

forth produce for three years. And you shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old produce until the ninth year; until her produce comes in you shall eat of the old produce."

There you see a definite command that one particular year should be set aside in which the *whole farm* should rest by being uncultivated. Also you see a *very distinct promise* that God will so abundantly bless you in the sixth year that your produce will last until the fall crops are harvested in the end of the eighth year to give you food for the ninth year.

You should be diligent in your work, but not overly concerned with such matters as your physical needs, because there is very little that *you* can do about it. *Making your crops grow is one of God's jobs.* Strive for greater spiritual growth and God will supply your needs. "For your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him" (Mat. 6:8).

"Take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed?'—for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Mat. 6:25-34).

What about shrubbery and flowers? How should you care for them in the sabbath year? The answer is that you should keep the house and its surroundings neat with whatever lawn and hedge trimming may be necessary. God would not want you to let your home become run-down and dilapidated looking. The law of the sabbatical year involves *only that land from which crops are harvested, removed, sold or stored.* It does not include your pasture or the lawn, shrubbery, and flowers around your home.

How to Figure Your Sabbath Year

The sabbath year is counted according to the Old Testament from about one Feast of Tabernacles to the next, beginning and ending in the autumn of the year. In ancient Israel the sabbatical years included the Jubilee every 50th year. The Jubilee is reckoned *only when there is a God-given permanent inheritance.*

After the Jews returned from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah they were not given any permanent inheritance. Therefore God did not require them to keep a jubilee—but only the sabbatical years every seventh year.

After the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity they reckoned sabbatical years, without Jubilees, from the time they *reoccupied* the land. *We are in a similar situation today.*

We have no permanent inheritance. It is apparent that God intends us to use a personal, and not a national, system. *Your sabbath year would be the seventh year* from the time that this knowledge comes to you—or from *your conversion, counted from one Feast of Tabernacles to the next*. Count the year of your conversion as your first year if it is more than half a year.

Is This Your Problem?

Someone is sure to ask, "Should renters, as well as landowners, keep the sabbath year?" The answer is an emphatic "yes."

There may be landowners who will not allow their renters to let the whole land rest for a year. Renters do not have the authority to force the issue in this case but must submit to the demands of the owner. In this case the renter should let a portion rest each year until it has all rested. Through this method the land will at least have its recuperative rest.

The exact year that the land rests is not of primary importance because *Christians are not now an organized community. They do not all have the same sabbath year anyway.*

Since renters do not *own* the land, they must not insist that the *owners* obey God. Instead, they may have to find work and a farm elsewhere.

Actually, all land renters who are obeying God should, *after wise counsel*, aim to become landowners so that they will have full authority to farm according to God's principles. (But don't buy a farm in a drought-stricken area!)

If you are obeying God, you, like Abraham, must be willing to leave the locality in which your ancestors lived. But **BEFORE** you move into a new area, *make sure you can make a living there.* God is not obligated to supply your needs if you move into a desolate, drought-stricken area, or if you grow up in such an area and stay there. You should start your farming venture in an area that is not yet suffering.

Then, *after you have fulfilled your normal obligations and are obeying and trusting God to the best of your ability, God will supply all your needs!* Of this, you have His *sure promise* in Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 11-12 and Matthew 6:25-34. Read these scriptures carefully.

Land Left Fallow Every 2nd or 3rd Year?

There may arise the question, "What should be done with land that is already being left idle every second, third, or fourth year? How should it be handled in order to conform to God's sabbath year?"

Three general types of land are being

managed in this manner. The first type to be considered is *good, productive land* that is periodically being left idle, usually being seeded to a winter legume or other soil builder. Such a practice builds the soil up to a richer, more productive capacity and should in no way be discouraged. However, this should be *in addition* to the sabbatical rest.

In some Plains States areas there is fertile soil that must be *summer fallowed* every other year because it receives so little rainfall that it will not produce yearly crops. In such an area, it would be permissible to summer fallow in a sabbatical year so that the land will not be sapped of all its surface water, which is needed for the following year's crop. Some in dry areas have not summer fallowed their land, letting weeds grow to maturity. They did not raise a crop in the eighth year. But in each succeeding year the production has steadily increased *well beyond any previous yearly average.*

If you were to summer fallow during your sabbatical year, you should allow some growth to spring up, but disk it into the soil while it is young and tender enough to decompose rapidly. In the Jewish translation of the Old Testament, the word "rest" is translated by "lie fallow."

Another grade of soil is occasionally left idle because it is too poor to produce crops any more often. Such soil is gradually wasting away and is so thin that it should not be cultivated in the first place. Rather, it ought to be seeded to a good pasture grass *and turned into permanent pasture.*

It is *vitaly important*, however, that you *do not overgraze your land!* One cause of the present distress in our Western states is that much of the land has been overgrazed in the interest of *temporary* higher profits.

If too many cattle are on the land they will nibble the grass *so short* that it will afford no *protective covering* for the soil. The land will then dry up—the grass will starve—the topsoil will be blown away.

Some land is overgrazed even under the best grazing arrangement. Such land has already been worn out and should be left to nature so that shrubs and trees may take over and enrich the soil and, at the same time, produce a tree crop for future generations. Do not think of *present profits only.* Think of future generations who will reclaim this land after the captivity—after the land shall have kept its sabbaths.

What Work Should One Do in the Sabbath Year?

Some will want to know, "What should I do on the sabbath year? I know

I shouldn't become idle. Should I get a job in town?"

Considering the purpose of the sabbath year, you should not get a job *until you have put your farm in good repair.* The sabbath year does for your land what the sabbath day does for your physical body. One rejuvenates the physical body; the other rejuvenates and improves the land. Surely you have buildings and fences that need repairing. Do you need new fences? Then build them. Digging post holes will not be a violation of the principle of letting the land rest. The sabbath year is *a sabbath for the land.* It's the year you work for the land instead of the land working for you.

Possibly your home needs remodeling and painting. Take time to renovate it thoroughly in your seventh year. That will be the best opportunity you will have to make of it the kind of home you want. Overhaul or repair all of your machinery—make sure that everything is in good condition before the beginning of the eighth year.

After all this is accomplished, why not take an *educational vacation?* Go to the cities' libraries and museums to study and broaden your understanding of the world around you. You might also visit some of the nation's beautiful parks or attend concerts that would be inaccessible in the other six years.

When you have done all of these things that you *can afford*—go ahead and get a job for the remainder of the year! *It is good to stay busy,* and the extra money can certainly be useful.

Trust God

Remember that the sabbath year is a time for rejoicing, created for the benefit of man. If you *obey* God and *trust* Him, in *faith*, He will fully supply all your needs. In Deuteronomy 11:13-15 God promises you that if you *obey* Him, He will send you rain at the right season so that your fields will produce abundant crops and your pastures plenty of grass ". . . that you may eat and be satisfied."

Do you think it would be difficult for God to punish the nation *without injuring you?* Turn to Psalm 91:7-10 and read God's answer to this question: "A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the Eternal, who is my refuge, and the Most High, your habitation; there shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling."

Turn to Amos 4:7, also, and read: "I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city:

one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered." This definitely *proves* that God can give *you* rain while your neighbor suffers from drought. If you doubt that this refers to our day, read carefully verses 6-12. The statement, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" at the end of verse 12 shows that this Scripture is for our day—just before the return of Christ.

Could you want stronger promises? What could be stronger than these as-

surances taken directly from God's inspired word? Do you believe God? If you do not, you have a very wretched life ahead of you! Anyone can see that conditions are worsening the world over. Human scheming certainly cannot save you from the rapidly approaching chaos and ruin. Are you going to continue disobeying God like the world around you and suffer for it? Or will you OBEY Him so that He can heap HIS BLESSINGS upon you?

Is JUDAISM the Religion of Moses?

(Continued from page 8)

doubtedly many of them did attend the annual festivals which were held in the synagogues and at the Temple in Jerusalem. To the Jews the annual festivals were like national holidays. But the evidence is clearly against the masses attending the synagogues *regularly* every Sabbath.

It has been conjectured by some that the Nazareth synagogue may have been built later than the time of Christ because it was not situated in the highest part of the city, as they supposedly think it should have been. However, Edersheim shows that this is not a proper criterion and rejects the supposition. (*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 433). There is every reason to believe that this small synagogue was the one Jesus attended. In their visit to Nazareth in 1956, both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong came to the same conclusion as did Edersheim—it is the very synagogue that existed in Jesus' day.

This religious condition in Palestine nearly 2,000 years ago should not surprise us much. Today it is common for many of the people who profess Christianity to attend church only on the two pagan holidays that almost all churches celebrate today—Easter and Christmas. The rest of the year finds the majority not attending church with any regularity. The Jews, in Christ's day, can be compared in like manner with the common tendency today.

How Many Synagogues in Palestine?

It is not known exactly how many synagogues there were throughout Palestine in Christ's time. However, there are some hints as to the number.

Herford tells us that almost every area which had a considerable Jewish population had at least one synagogue in each of its cities. (*Judaism in the New Testament Period*, pp. 27, 133). It must be remembered that Capernaum,

as large as it was, had *one* synagogue. There can be little question about the fact that there was at least one synagogue in almost every town of any size. This seems to be a foregone conclusion of all the writers on the subject.

We happen to know, again from Josephus, that there were 240 cities and villages in all of Galilee (*Life of Josephus*, p. 45). Galilee was much more prosperous than Judea in the south, and in fact, Galilee was far and above the province of Judea in material blessings. Edersheim says the cost of living in Judea, for example, was five times that of Galilee because of Judea's relative sparsity of good soil and crops (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, pp. 224, 225). However, if we allow Judea to also have had about 240 cities and villages as did Galilee (although there were probably less), then we arrive at about 500 cities and villages in all of Palestine that could have had a synagogue. This would represent about 500 synagogues. But, if we allow some of the cities to have had two or more synagogues, the number could be raised to about 1,000 synagogues. That is, if every city and village did have a synagogue.

If there were, being extremely liberal, about 1,000 synagogues scattered throughout Palestine out of a population of 3,000,000 people, this would mean one synagogue for every 3,000 people. The sizes of the synagogues were from the very small, held in the home (*ibid.*, vol. i, p. 433), to the size of the Capernaum synagogue with as many as 500. There were certainly none which could hold 3,000, nor even a third of that amount. And the majority were small synagogues not much bigger than the one in Nazareth.

That there could hardly be more than 1,000 synagogues throughout Palestine is obvious in another respect, too, when

we consider that there were only 6,000 Pharisees to minister in these synagogues. THE PHARISEES WERE THE SYNAGOGUE RULERS (Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, p. 134). However, not all Pharisees were religious leaders in the synagogues. For example, Josephus, the Jewish historian, was a Pharisee but was not a ruler or synagogue official. In fact, a good percentage of Pharisees were not a part of the synagogue government.

And besides this, there were several offices to be filled in each synagogue (ISBE, vol. v, pp. 2878, 2879). The limited number of Pharisees available could hardly have filled the necessary posts for more than 1,000 separate synagogues.

With about 3,000 Jews for each synagogue in Palestine, and the synagogues ranging in size from around 75 members (even 10 if held in a home, as was sometimes allowed) to around 500 people, it can easily be seen that a good number of the Common People *did not attend*.

Popular Judaism Like Popular Churchianity

The religious condition of the Jews during the days of Christ can be compared with our own society. Today, there are about 750 million people who claim to be Christians, but how many of these are fervent in their beliefs? How many are consistent church goers? How many are zealously interested in their church? How many put their church above anything else in their lives? How many really know God?

Even the major Protestant and Catholic leaders are appalled at the seeming lack of real interest expressed by so many of their members. It is a known fact that the majority of people today just aren't interested in real, heart-felt religion at all—even though most claim to be Christians.

Should we then be amazed that over 95% of the Jews of Christ's time were no more religious than our own people? Of course not! People were the same then as they are today.

The false notion that the Jews of Christ's day were intensely interested in religion—the religion of Moses—must be eradicated from our minds. Such deception must be replaced by the cold facts! The Jews were no more fervent about the religion of Moses than the majority of Christians are today about the religion of Christ!

Yet when they heard Christ's message it began to awaken them to their senses, just as millions are being awakened from their lethargy today by the WORLD TOMORROW broadcast.

(To be continued next issue)