



Your Living Environment

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DWELL IN THE BEST OF THE LAND!

"And God said...let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth;....And said let the earth bring forth tender grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind..." (Gen.1:9-11).

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:8-9).

This is a short outline of the creation of man's environment. It is but the briefest description of a stupendous miracle -- the details of which are still puzzling man after nearly 6,000 years! We unthinkingly pass over the unbelievable detail that is implied in these few words. Just look for example, at the staggering complexity of soil formation, with a vast array of minerals coming from the basic rock strata. Hundreds of biological, chemical and mechanical inter-actions go to make them available to plants!

These truly wonderful processes can operate only through that one medium -- SOIL. And in this issue of Your Living Environment we want to focus on the importance God has attached to "soil" down through the history of man.

It is true, "MAN" is the focal point of God's physical creation on this planet, NOT "soil". However we might profitably reflect for a while on the vital role of "SOIL" as it is such a basic part of our environment. This highly variable and yet precious commodity must have figured very largely in the over-all 7,000 year plan of God.

MAN'S ATTITUDE TO SOIL

First let us briefly see how soil has "figured" in MAN'S approach to his environment and destiny. Is it exaggerating to say

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that the English language more than hints at human contempt for this God-given blessing? We customarily speak of treating someone, or being treated -- "LIKE DIRT". Then there is also the frequently used expression -- "COMMON AS DIRT".

Is the analogy not valid? Is there anything physical for which man has shown more contempt than the soil sustaining his very existence?

Have you ever contrasted this attitude with man's idolatrous worship of such things as -- the sun, the moon, the stars, animals, insects and possibly even plants? But is there any record of man having worshipped soil? We don't know of any, though there is probably an exception somewhere. Soil has generally been treated "like dirt" -- thrashed, abused and depleted! It has been scorched, burned, plundered, powdered, stomped and exposed to rain, floods, wind and every conceivable human neglect!

What has been the result? MAN has always paid a terrible PRICE! for this law-breaking, through a lowered environment and inferior health. No man should become a "soil-worshipper" but he could well afford to get his relationship with the soil in a right perspective!!

The only chance man has of ever getting anything in right perspective is by looking to God. So let us now see something of the value our Creator attaches to this basic ingredient of all living matter.

TO "DRESS" and "KEEP"

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground... (Gen.2:7). "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air" (Gen.2:19).

God need not have formed His physical living creation out of SOIL, but was it not both symbolic and logical that He chose the material used for every subsequent generation? This substance has been a basic ingredient of all plants, animals and men ever since.

Agriculturalists like to play on the scriptural meaning of the phrase -- "All flesh is grass" (Isa.40:6). What they imply is, in a sense, quite true. But should we in agriculture not be equally mindful of the fact that ALL GRASS IS SOIL?

Such a childishly simple truth should have been easy to accept, but the historical record indicates otherwise. Even Adam could not proclaim innocence through ignorance. We know that God gave the first man instruction in His spiritual laws, but He also gave necessary guidance in physical laws too:

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen.2:15).

"DRESS" means to work and by implication to serve as a bondman, or become servant to. And "KEEP" means to guard, hedge about, protect, preserve and look narrowly to. (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). Contrast this commission with man's performance; abuse, greed, neglect, robbery and destruction!

Man has always been bent on GETTING from the soil, but if he would start GIVING, God would soon begin to overload him with abundance.

Of all the punishments God could have meted out to Adam for disobedience, notice that the very first was a curse ON THE SOIL (Gen.3:17-18)!

Cain's punishment for the murder of his brother is also most significant: "And now you are cursed from the earth...When you till the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength..." (Gen.4:11-12).

Understanding that animal husbandry is an integral part of soil management, enhances our appreciation of the possible differences between the approach of Cain and Abel to agriculture (Gen.4:2,4,).

MAN -- ARCHITECT OF HIS OWN DESTRUCTION!

Within just six chapters of the account of man's history the reader is at the point where:

"...God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (presumably including soil management).

"And the Lord said, I will destroy man...from the face of the earth; from man unto beast and the creeping thing and the fowls of the air;... The earth was corrupt before God..." (Gen.6:5,7,11).

GOD -- BEGINS A GREAT NATION

Some generations after The Flood we read that God greatly blessed his faithful servant Abram:

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever....Then Abram...came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron,..." (Gen.13:15,18).

"...I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it...In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen.15:7,18).

What kind of land was he given? Was it eroded desert? or was it rich and fertile? This point was very important because Abram was already "very rich in livestock". By skipping forward a few hundred years we can find the answer in God's Word. It helps us understand that God placed real importance on quality soil as a basic building block for His specially chosen nation!

"Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and...they came unto the brook Eschol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes and they bare it between two upon a staff! (Num.13:17-20,25).

"...they...came to Moses...and they told him...We came unto the land...and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it" (Num.13:25-27).

If this land was so fertile after 500 years of Canaanite occupation it makes you wonder what it must have been like in Abraham's time! Perhaps we can get an idea of this too.

"...Isaac sowed in that land and received in the same year an hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great" (Gen.26:12,13).

Under today's system, England produces TWENTY-EIGHT fold! The world's large grain producing nations such as America and Australia, manage a national average of approximately TWENTY-FIVE fold!! "Organic" farmers don't get a hundred fold today either. But what fantastic natural fertility must God have placed in the particular soil He used in founding His nation under the Patriarchs!

GOD -- SUPPLIES OUR BLESSINGS

King David said of God: "He waters the hills from his chambers: ".He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he might bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart" (Psa.104:13-15).

"He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly and suffereth not their cattle to decrease" (Psa.107:38).

"And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase" (Psa.107:37).

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us;...That your way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among the nations....Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us" (Psa.67:1,2,6).

Do we need reminding that the most basic thing to "health among the nations" is highly nutritious food and that this is impossible without rich soil? And even the richest of soils must have its fertility protected and guarded by obedience to God's laws.

Unavoidable proof of this exists today from the Euphrates all the way to the Nile and on for the next three thousand miles to Tangier. The same basic situation also exists from Gibraltar all the way back to the Euphrates on the other side of the Mediterranean too!!

JACOB -- THE NEXT GENERATION

Notice the very first part of the blessing that Isaac asked God to pass on to his son Jacob:

"Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine" (Gen.27:28).

Surely "fatness" is synonymous with soil fertility!

These are blessings that can come only to people living under an assured rainfall and on really fertile soil. The next question we may reasonably ask ourselves is -- how did it all work out?

After years of voluntary exile from his native area (because of the way he obtained the above blessing) Jacob finally returned to the general area in which his father and grandfather had prospered (Gen.33:17-18, 35:1,6,21,27).

"And God said unto him...the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it and to thy seed after thee will I give the land" (Gen.35:11-12).

Jacob's next recorded move was into Egypt where God fulfilled His promise and reunited the family under Joseph (Gen.46:1-7). Now we have God's new nation of people numbering seventy at this time, but to what kind of an area did He lead them? God was working it out, however, old Israel knew where the good land was in Egypt and did his part to see that his family took over some of it.

"And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen....And Joseph said unto his brethren...I will go up, and shew Pharaoh...when Pharaoh shall call you...ye shall say... Thy servants trade hath been about livestock from our youth... that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen" (Gen.46:28,31,33,34).

"And Pharaoh spake...saying....The land of Egypt is before you; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen" (Gen.47:5,6).

It is obvious that both Jacob and Joseph knew where the best land was to be had in Egypt and that they placed great importance upon it. Pharaoh's words indicate that he too appreciated this fact and furthermore knew what they were up to! Most important of course is the fact that Goshen was precisely where God wanted His people at that time. (God does tell us that He is the one who sets the boundaries of the nations). (Deut.32:8).

A DOUBLE PORTION -- TO JOSEPH

After some 17 years living in Goshen, the ancient Israel said to his son Joseph: "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Moreover, I have given to you one portion above your brethren..." (Gen.48:21,22).

His grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh were to be blessed as his own sons (Gen.48:5-5). They were prophesied to be collectively:

"...a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches shall run over the wall" (Gen.49:22).

"The Blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph..." (Gen.49:26).

Were they? Let us see for ourselves: "...the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Ex.1:7).

We need to get the fact that there was much more than a population explosion involved here! China, India and Latin America are three modern lands "filled" (to over-flowing) with people, but judging by Oxfam pictures, there has not been a very "abundant" increase!

The term "fruitful bough" is symbolic, but it may also be very literal. Short of an outright miracle, boughs become unduly fruitful for one reason only -- because they are located in a highly fertile soil and receive rain from God in due season.

That promise was fulfilled when Israel's family left Egypt and returned to the fantastically rich environment referred to by Joshua and Caleb. Ephraim and Manasseh each took up a portion of that land on at least equal terms with the families of their eleven uncles.

And what blessings they received -- "So the children went in and possessed the land...a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness" (Neh.9:24,25).

We should not need reminding of the application of these verses to the past 350 years of modern history and none have prospered like Ephraim and Manasseh! We have truly possessed the "fat places" of the earth. What we have done with them is quite another story and another issue. Prophecy warns us of the consequences, but we are also shown the future under a most merciful God:

"...I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings" (Ezek.36:11).

"...in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel...and the earth shall yield her increase" (Ezek.34:14,27). "...the Lord shall comfort Zion...He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isa.51:3).