

# The Environmental Crisis - Its Cause and Cure

*"And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Genesis 2:9).*

## A Miracle of Nature

Consider for a moment a large eucalyptus tree.

It is a thing of beauty, appealing to our senses by its noble form and subtle colors.

But it is more than an adornment for the earth or for an artist's canvas.

A large eucalyptus tree is among earth's oldest and largest living creatures. One hectare (2.5 acres) of eucalyptus trees produces enough oxygen to support forty people and will collect from the ground and discharge into the air twenty-five *tons* of water a day, all carried through channels of the diameter of a human hair.

A eucalyptus tree produces food, fiber, building material, shade, shelter, protection for the soil and energy. It is a home for useful and beautiful birds, for reptiles, insects and a great range of other living things. It may yield turpentine, plastics, paper, fuel-wood and furniture. Distilled, it can yield valuable oils and resins.

It binds the earth, shielding it from erosion. It provides fodder for livestock. It brings water to the topsoil. It is a source of pleasure for hiker, tourist, forester and farmer.

God said through Moses: *"the tree of the field is man's life"* (Deuteronomy 20:19).

A eucalyptus tree is a marvel, a miracle. Its intricate design reveals the hand and mind of God the Creator.

Moreover, with all his amazing science and technology, Man has not found any other location in the universe where this marvel of creation which we call a tree does, or can possibly, exist. Like us, it is unique to planet Earth.

God intended it that way. Although the unimaginable vastness of the universe, with galaxies of suns and bathed in streams of cosmic radiation, is His handiwork, the Creator has filled this earth, and seemingly this earth alone, with millions of species of living things. The Biblical book of Genesis, in simple language, describes the origin of the eucalyptus and all trees:

*"Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds'. And it was so" (Genesis 1:11).*

An awe-struck and divinely inspired poet, sightseeing in the land of Israel nearly three thousand years ago, was moved to eloquence by the contemplation of the very abundance of living things around him:

*"How manifold are Thy works, O Lord!  
In wisdom Thou hast made them all;  
The earth is full of Thy riches.  
There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
Teeming with creatures beyond number -  
Living things both large and small" (Psalm 104:24-25).*

He was also impressed by the ever-recurring cycle of life, by what we call today the equilibrium or balance of nature:

*"Thou hidest Thy face, they are terrified;  
Thou takest away their breath.  
They die and return to the dust.  
Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created.  
And Thou renewest the face of the earth" (vv. 29-30).*

The Elohim or angelic spirit beings, are entrusted with all God's creative works; hence the use of phrases such as "let *us* make" in Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible. The aim of the *Elohim* with Man is stated in Psalm 8:

*"Thou (God) madest him (Man) a little lower than the angels  
(Elohim)  
And crowned him with glory and honor.  
Thou didst make him ruler over the works of Thy hands;  
Thou put everything under his feet:  
All flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
All that swim in the paths of the seas.  
O Lord our Lord, how majestic is Thy Name in all the earth! (vv. 5-9)*

It is significant that Man's first employment was in keeping with this overall aim of stewardship for God's creation:

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).

From the very beginning Man has exercised his passion for *naming* the forms of life with which our earth, seas and skies are so richly endowed. There was a simple, and no doubt mainly symbolic, ceremony in the Garden of Eden:

"Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and beasts of the field" (vv. 19-20).

The responsibilities given by God to Man over His creation at that time were awesome. Over the centuries since, as Man has explored the realms of nature from the barren shores of Antarctica to the green and humid jungles of the tropics, he has continued to name

the various species he has found, a list which now runs into the millions. The invention of the microscope opened a new world and revealed millions more. So complex is the field of *taxonomy* today (the naming of life forms) that no biologist or naturalist can possibly even hope to comprehend even a tiny fraction of this highly specialized area of study.

Curiosity about the world of nature, for which God made man responsible, has characterized all thinking people.

Long ago, Solomon, king of Israel, we are told:

"described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom" (1 Kings 4:33-34).

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and teacher of Alexander the Great, who lived six hundred years after Solomon, was one of the first to systematically describe and classify various living creatures. Some scientists today spend a lifetime investigating just one species. For the range in size and shape and design of other life forms with which man comes into contact, which he affects and which affect him in turn, is so unimaginably vast as to boggle the mind.

On the other hand there is the mighty whale, *Orca*, a species which in his greed man has almost destroyed, whose enormous heart alone is a pump weighing half a ton. Towards the other end of the scale of size is the *Demodex folliculorum*, a tiny eight-legged mite which is born, mates, reproduces and dies inside the eyelashes of almost every person on earth; and the infinitely tiny tardigrade, a creature looking in an electron microscope like some prehistoric monster, which inhabits every drop of water we drink in countless millions.

As the first choice for the post of manager and steward of the earth for God, Adam was a disappointment. Despite the encouraging

beginning referred to earlier (Genesis 2:19-20), he and Eve craved to be "like the Elohim, knowing good and evil" (vv. 3-4). As though the possession of such awesome responsibilities was not enough, the first couple sought even greater privileges. There was one species of tree in the garden of Eden that they were forbidden to utilize in any way. They were warned "if you eat of it you will surely die", but also it represented the moral discipline which God required of man. It simply yet symbolically indicated the divinely-imposed limits of freedom ("you are free to eat from any tree", except this one). Sad to say, our first parents set a pattern. There was only *one* thing limiting their wide-ranging freedom - but that was the very thing they had to have! That foolish action, craving and grasping what is forbidden to us by God, is what the Bible calls *sin* - then and now.

### **Sin: The Basic Cause Of the Crisis**

Wildlife management is an important aspect of this stewardship of the earth. Man has not been accustomed to thinking of destroying wildlife as a *sin*. In fact, hunting and shooting of various wild creatures, many of them useful to man and quite defenseless, is still looked upon as something heroic. In the writer's own country, Jamaica, a youth is not thought big or grown up until he has acquired skill at killing the many beautiful birds of the forest with a big catapult, or in wealthier families, a shotgun.

But we should take careful note of what God says through His inspired psalmist:

*"Every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine. For the world is Mine, and all that is in it" (Psalm 50:10-12).*

One consequence of sin is stated in Genesis 3:17-18:

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles

for you, and you will eat plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return".

Man's God-given responsibility for the earth and its living creatures was not diminished by the entry of sin and death into the world. True, as managers of the Edenic paradise, Adam and Eve were summarily ejected and sent to fend for themselves in the harsher world outside. But their task was now much harder. Nature took on a rougher, tougher aspect. Instead of being a kind of curator of a combined botanic garden and zoo in a gentle world of nature - for that is the impression given by Genesis 2 - *Homo sapiens* had to fight for survival.

The apostle Paul explained:

"the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (8:20-21).

Moreover, the New Testament informs us in several places that when God spoke of "man" having rule or dominion over creation, it was not any man or woman He had in mind. Psalm 8 is a prophecy of one truly representative Man, Jesus the Son of God, who will truly fulfil all that God intended for this earth. Paul in writing to the Hebrews points out what every environmentalist knows to be true: that "at present we do not see everything subject to him (man)" (2:8). Right now, far from being a paradise, wisely managed on God's behalf by responsible human stewardship, this beautiful earth and its multitude of life forms is battered, exploited by greedy men, despoiled, polluted and desperately sick.

But the apostle Paul does offer hope: "we see Jesus", he says. Elsewhere he identifies Jesus, the Son of God, as the focus of all

God's works, the firstborn over all creation. "All things were created through and for *him*" (Colossians 1:16).

### **Wise Laws Given Through Moses**

The national laws given by God to Israel through Moses contained many provisions which were environmentally sound. Indeed, in this respect as in many others., the Mosaic law was superior to any other ancient law, and was far in advance of its time (1440 BC).

There were laws for the protection of birds (Deuteronomy 22:6-7), for the conservation of forests (20:19) and for the humane care of animals (22:4,10; 25:4). The land was to be rested periodically in a cycle of 'sabbath' years, which guaranteed that its fertility was maintained (Leviticus 24:34). Quite specifically God said: "*Do not pollute the land where you are*" (Numbers 35:33). The Hebrew word for "pollute" is derived from *chaneph*, which means *filth*. The land was to be kept clean, holy and fit to be both man's home and a sanctuary for the Almighty.

Most significant of the principles enshrined in this Law was the concept that man is a *trustee* or manager for the land, responsible for its care to the Owner, God Himself:

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land -- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills ... a land where you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied *praise the Lord your God* for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you *do not forget* the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands" (Deuteronomy 8:7-10).

In modern times this principle *has* been forgotten, and this is the chief cause of the despoliation of the earth. People - whether as individuals, or organized as private companies or government agencies view the land, the sea, the air, the whole of nature in a selfish way. It is there, so if they have possession, they can do what

they like with any resource they find. As Moses warned, they forget the Lord.

Sometimes this selfish attitude to the earth is deliberate, for many people refuse to acknowledge any God as being supreme Creator and Owner of the universe. In many other cases it is due to ignorance, or a carefree approach, which fails to recognize that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof".

Such carelessness is often responsible for much devastation due to fire. One disastrous fire in Kalimantan (Indonesia) in 1983 destroyed 8000 square kilometers of rainforest, 5500 of swamp forest, 12,000 of commercial forest and 7500 of cultivated land, thus affecting a total of thirty three thousand square kilometers, an area larger than Wales and nearly half the size of Tasmania.

Sometimes the polluting activities of one generation are not revealed until a later one finds out what has been done. When the writer was at Monash University in Melbourne in 1983, a student described how he had been puzzled at the very high incidence of cancer in a certain valley in the state of Victoria not far from the capital. His research revealed that when in the nineteenth century gold was discovered and mined, piles of waste tailings were left behind and later were grassed over. It was not known at the time that these forgotten piles of debris contained radioactive minerals which rain washed into the streams -- thus insidiously and persistently polluting the water supply of the whole valley.

### **The Environmental Crisis Today**

Lester Brown, a project director of the Worldwatch Institute, heads a team of scientists which produces an annual report entitled *State of the World*. This publication is eagerly sought by governments and decision-makers worldwide. It is a sober, careful, abundantly-documented study - not propaganda by idealistic "greenies". For those with no solid faith in the purpose of God revealed in the Bible, for those who do not believe God's promise to send His Son

Jesus Christ to "regenerate" the earth and its peoples when he reigns supreme from Jerusalem (Matthew 19:28), each year's issue of this book is bound to create increasing depression, helplessness and despair. After receiving some vivid photographs from the present writer, a noted British earth scientist wrote in reply: "I hope you will be fortunate again in visiting such interesting locations and report the diabolical behavior of man on the environment - one continually despairs about such things".

A sad theme recurs through all the Worldwatch reports: man's apparent helplessness to correct the world's ills, and to avert the onrushing environmental and social disaster. He has the technological expertise; but he does not possess the unity, moral will, political will or courage to use this expertise.

The 1985 *State of the World* report before me now demonstrates

- \* That man is slowly changing the world's climate - **for** the worse, and towards greater threat of extremes.
- \* The world's water supplies are getting scarcer and much more poisoned and polluted. A "new water economy" for the world is desperately needed.
- \* The oceanic fisheries are over-exploited, in some cases actually to extinction.
- \* Acid rain is killing lakes, forests and especially soils over vast areas of the world, especially in North America and Europe.
- \* One fifth of all living species could become extinct by the year 2000.
- \* Twenty-five billion tons of soil annually is being eroded from the world's croplands - this is the net amount in excess of soil being formed. (Modern farm technology often makes matters worse. The present writer saw this very vividly in the wheatlands near Moree in Australia, where the use, or rather misuse, of the 'laser-plough' greatly accelerates soil loss by wind and water).

The well-being and indeed the very existence of five thousand million human beings on earth depend almost entirely upon one

single lifeline - soil. Destroy it and we are destroyed. Protect it and by God's power it will yield for us abundantly. No country in the world is so seriously affected by soil destruction as is Australia. The Australian Conservation Foundation puts it this way:

"For over a hundred years the European settlers of Australia used the land without thought of the future. Vast clearing and overstocking took its toll on the land. Today as a result of past abuse, fifty-two percent of the land in use in Australia needs some form of treatment for land degradation. A third of the continent is affected by soil erosion. The cost of repairing this damage is over one billion dollars. As if that is not enough to be worried about, it is also a fact that as a result of inappropriate land use and inadequate effort to prevent or repair soil damage, *the problem is getting worse*".

### **The Deforestation Threat**

Trees are being felled (and mostly not replanted) worldwide at the rate of nearly fifteen square kilometers every hour.

Sixty-eight *species* (that is, different genetic types, each "after his kind") of plant life are being destroyed every day.

In the time it takes you to read this booklet about five hundred hectares of tropical rainforests will have disappeared from the face of the earth. Since 1950 the world has lost over half its trees.

Clearing and cutting down mature *tropical* forests has quite different effects from harvesting trees in temperate countries. Covering just one-fifteenth of the earth's land surface, rain forests may harbor nearly half of all living plants and animals. The tropical forest is a wonderfully interdependent complex *system* of plant, animal, bird, insect and microbe. There are hundreds of *species* in every hectare of land. Usually each species of plant is kept alive and is pollinated by just one specialized kind of insect, bird or bat. In turn many animals and insects depend upon one type of plant alone for food and survival. Thus to log out a particular species of

tree from a tropical forest is to destroy other dependent life forms, and permanently disturb the whole system.

Many of the mighty sixty-meter tropical forest giants like the valuable *Diptocarps* and the *Ceiba* of the West Indies and Central America have an illusion of grandiose strength, but as tropical biologist Allen Young points out "the real power is in the tiny fungi in the roots. When the forest is cleared away, these fungi disappear too. Food crops do well for only a year or two. Thereafter it becomes cost-prohibitive to buy fertilizers to replace the remarkable fungi of tropical root systems".

That is why the recent massive clearing of tropical rainforests in densely-populated countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brazil (and less populated countries like Australia as well) is a terrible danger to mankind and the earth. The lands thus cleared for farming are *not* fertile. They cannot sustain permanent farms like those in temperate countries. They are not going to support the people now attempting to occupy them for very long. Many millions of people who have settled land which has been cleared in the tropics will soon find that "nature" will take its revenge. They will have to move again, too soon there will be nowhere else to go. What will they do then?

### **The Specter of Desertification**

The danger to us all from the rapid desertification of vast areas of our planet is not scaremongering by a few streetcorner religious cranks who think they see doomsday and the end of the world just around the corner. One of the world's outstanding authorities on desertification, Alan Grainger of Oxford University, lists five environmental problems that are critical today and are ringing alarm bells for all mankind. These are:

1. More than a fifth of the Earth - home of eighty million people is directly threatened by desertification. Some one hundred countries are affected.

2. Badly managed irrigation systems in many countries are making salty, waterlogged wastelands.
3. The Sahel drought in Africa - largely a man-made disaster killed a quarter of a million people and three and a half million animals. Aid spent to prevent further drought in Africa is being spent on the wrong types of project, and is making matters worse.
4. Tree planting - for fuel, for timber, and to prevent desertification - is proceeding fifty times too slowly.
5. Environmental management is low priority for politicians, especially in poor countries, because the people affected have little political power. Governments want aid spent in cities, where the results benefit the nation's elite. Aid donors want aid spent in cities and on projects easy to identify and implement.

One of the few exceptions to the desertification of the world is the country of Israel. According to Dr. Amos Richmond of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Bible times "flourishing agriculture and a thriving civilization" existed in the desert regions of Israel.

Another professor at this Israeli university, Dr. Yahuda Gradus, who is a personal friend of the present writer, also recently, published a book entitled *Desert Agriculture, Past and Present*. This book has a title page quote from Isaiah 43:19: "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert".

With the twentieth century revival of Israel, in fulfillment of Bible prophecies, this "flourishing agriculture" has been partially restored. This is a matter of envy, especially from other Middle East countries. As the present writer has found personally, Israelis at international conferences, who try to share their success and describe their country's efforts to make the desert bloom, find themselves isolated. They are sometimes shouted down and resolutions condemning them are easily passed at such conferences.

### **A Horrifying Prospect**

Earth scientists all over the world speak with one voice that there is a global environmental crisis of horrifying dimensions. The evidence is unmistakable: spreading deserts, soil erosion, ruined agricultural land, dying forests, poisoned air and water, famine, sinister diseases induced by polluted environments. All experts today are unanimous in concurring that humanity's very existence on earth is threatened. Bible believers recognize that without divine intervention to restore paradise on earth, mankind is doomed.

How did the situation get as bad as it is today? Because the environment can no longer cope with the assaults made upon it by sinful humanity. Man's greed has outstripped any sense of responsibility he has for the earth with whose wellbeing he is entrusted.

We have already referred to Psalm 104, one of many marvellous hymns in the Bible extolling creation and the Creator. The psalmist was evidently greatly impressed by his visit to Lebanon:

"The trees of the Lord are well watered,  
The cedars of Lebanon that He planted.  
There the birds make their nests;  
The stork has its home in the pine trees.  
The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
The crags are a refuge for the coneys" (vv. 16-18).

To him as a tourist, perhaps coming from arid Jerusalem, Lebanon seemed a veritable paradise on earth. The gushing streams reminded him of the rivers of Eden, its trees were like its well watered garden.

Today Lebanon is a virtual desert. Almost all its trees -- cedars and pines -- have been ruthlessly cut out. The Assyrians, then Nebuchadnezzar, the emperor of Babylon, the "head of gold" of Daniel 2, carted off immense quantities of lumber for huge building projects. The Greeks followed suit. In the Roman period, there was a brief respite, but by the fall of that empire the situation was

critical. The "desolating" Turks actually taxed trees, so that finished off the destruction quite effectively. Now most of the Lebanon is dead land: its soil and vegetation are gone, its usefulness is a thing of the past, and its people., when not fighting one another, subsist off trade and oil revenues from other Arab states.

The Caribbean, where the author of this booklet works as an environmental scientist, is, if that is possible, even worse. In the days of the Arawaks, every traveler was ecstatic with delight at the scenes of tropical verdure and abundance. Christopher Columbus described the whole area, and especially Haiti, in glowing terms.

What of today? Many parts of this once lush island chain, and Haiti in particular, are total ecological deserts, yielding nothing of value for man or beast.

Not so long ago, islands in the Pacific such as Vanuatu, and parts of Amazonia in South America, were considered to be impenetrable jungle, inhabited by cannibals. Today some Pacific islands and vast areas of the Amazon have been totally deforested - mainly bulldozed for chipboard or burned off to make way for a few wealthy cattle ranches. The consequences are profound. It is now known for certain that deforestation and desertification are slowly but inexorably changing the world's climate -for the worse, with less moisture and higher temperatures. The raped and brutalized earth is ceasing to "yield her increase". The ability of the natural systems to maintain and repair themselves is being jeopardized by overexploitation. Man wants too much, too quickly.

### **The Crisis Will Get Worse**

The environmental crisis, already severe and taxing the ingenuity of international organizations such as FAO and UNEP, *will get worse*. The prophets of God in the Bible make this abundantly plain. Zechariah, for example, refers to the deforestation of the Middle East which we mentioned earlier:

"Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen; the stately trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down" (11:1-2).

With clear insight, the prophet Isaiah has described our present plight and its real *cause*:

*"The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes; and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt" (24:5-6).*

He indicated that drought will remain a problem:

*"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish" (v. 4).*

In this same chapter 24, however, the prophet also indicates the *cure*: divine intervention when God's Son assumes the reins of government:

*"From the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty, therefore in the east give glory to the Lord,- exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel,  
In the islands of the sea.  
From the ends of the earth, we hear singing:  
'Glory to the Righteous One'.  
For the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem;  
and before its elders, gloriously" (vv. 14-16,23).*

In that Day the polluters will be removed from the earth they have defiled; in fact, they will be destroyed (Revelation 11:18).

Jesus speaks of terrible famines preceding his second coming, but they are not to create in us undue alarm, for they are but the *beginning* of the sorrows of the "last days" before he comes as King of Kings.

## **A Renewed Earth Filled With God's Glory**

When Jesus Christ returns to set up God's Kingdom on earth, that earth will be in a sorry state. Thousands of years of gross and selfish misuse of the planet will have to be reversed and its scars healed. So drastic will be the measures needed, that the Bible in several places describes the Kingdom of God as "a new earth" (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13). This does not mean that this present globe will be literally replaced by a different one, as some churches mistakenly teach. The sense is rather that so drastic will be the clean-up job required that the earth will be totally renewed.

There are glowing pictures, indeed very detailed and realistic ones, in the Bible of this renewed environment under the wise rule of Jesus Christ and his immortalized saints. The prophet Amos describes a situation where the agricultural seasons more or less run together:

*"The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes" (9:13).*

Psalm 72 emphasizes that in the reign of God's "royal Son"

"The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,  
The hills the fruit of righteousness.  
He will be like rain falling on a mown field,  
Like showers watering the earth" (v. 3,6).

Then will really flourish everywhere the bountiful world described in Psalm 65, at present only true in part for a few remote wilderness areas like Kakadu in Australia and parts of Alaska:

*"Thou visiteth the earth and water it, Thou enrich it abundantly.  
The streams of God are filled with water..  
The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.*

*The meadows are covered with flocks, and the valleys are mantled with grain;  
They shout for joy and sing" (v. 9,12,13).*

However, although Christ will be responsible for the "regeneration" of our devastated planet, we do not believe that this transformation is going to be effected by merely waving a magic wand. The whole work of restoration, moral and physical, will take a thousand years (Revelation 20:4) before the royal Son can present this earth, cured and redeemed of all its ills, and filled with the glory of God, to his heavenly Father (1 Corinthians 15:24,28).

There is another important reason why we consider the restoration of the world will take a considerable period of time. God's true people of all ages, raised from death and made immortal (along with those changed in a moment because they will be alive when Christ comes - 1 Corinthians 15:23,51-52) will assist Jesus Christ in his work of renewal. But there will also be many mortal survivors of the terrible war of Armageddon in the midst of which the Lord will return in glory to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:11-12). Zechariah refers to those who will be *left* from all the nations involved in the Armageddon war:

"Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles" (14:16).

The task of these mortals in the Kingdom will be once again to manage the planet for God properly.

Their first clean-up job will be disposing of the vast quantities of armaments and the casualties of that World War:

"Then those who live in the towns of Israel will go out and use the weapons for fuel ... for seven years they will use them for fuel. Men will be regularly employed to cleanse the land. Some will go throughout the land, and in addition to them, others will bury those

that remain on the ground . . . and so they will cleanse the land" (Ezekiel 39:9, 14-16).

"They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

So the unimaginably vast sums now devoted to the arms race will then be diverted to a more productive use: making the earth more fruitful.

Because this great task will be entrusted to these mortal survivors, supervised by immortal rulers, it will obviously take some time to complete. But eventually the environmental crisis will be cured. This earth will achieve the state designed for it by God - a planet filled with His glory. We have His own Word that it will one day come to pass:

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

### **Our Responsibility Now**

Those men and women who "long for the appearing" of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:8) will prepare themselves for the task of supervising the restoration of the earth so that it can become the paradise of God.

There is a view taught by many churches that 'paradise' is in heaven above.

This view is mistaken and fails to take account of the fact that God's purpose revealed in the Bible is focussed upon this earth. The first paradise experienced by man was a "garden" (that is what the word 'paradise' originally meant) in Eden. The future paradise, the paradise which was promised by Jesus to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), will be also upon earth (Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35).

The thief himself recognized this; he asked Jesus "Lord, remember me *when you come into your kingdom* ". There is no indication that he longed to go to heaven at death: he was looking for a place in God's new Kingdom age, when the earth will be a paradise. According to Jesus' promise, he will be there.

If you and I want to be there also, and see this earth regenerated, we must make the appropriate preparations now. Jesus told his disciples:

"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And *everyone* who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:28-29).

To "follow" the Lord means to obey the divine truths which he taught, put on his Name in baptism, and thereafter live a life of faith and willing service to him as Master and Lord, and patiently await his return in glory.

That is our primary responsibility. We know that God through His beloved Son will cure the environmental crisis, and we have faith that in His time He will do so - very effectively.

However, this fact does not exonerate us from a responsibility now to care for the earth he has entrusted to us. Although the specific national laws given through Moses have been done away in Christ, their spiritual principles remain. We are answerable to our Maker for how we use His earth.

This does not mean that we join protest marches and lie down in front of logging trucks, as some earnest lovers of the earth have been known to do. But it does mean that we take a lively interest in today's environmental crisis and play our small part in improving

that part of God's wide world for which we happen to be responsible.

In the day of Judgment God will acknowledge our efforts and grant us an abiding place in His new world where purity, truth, justice and peace will for ever flourish.