

God's Command to Till the Earth Touches ALL the Nations

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Back to Genesis Again for the Answers:

The saying is so true that "there really doesn't seem to be anything really new under the sun." To which I add my hearty agreement in AMEN. Men are generally rediscovering truths which God has possessed all the time. Sometimes they have even been revealed by God to men in the past and then been forgotten or rejected over time. One thing that is certain, God is the source of ALL knowledge and is the Truth, Only. The scriptures of the Hebrew Bible declare that in Him is no shadow of turning. He changeth not. And in another place the writer of Hebrews declares that He is the same yesterday, today and forever!

So why shouldn't we expect to find God's answers to today's questions recorded in the beginning of God's relationship with man? So it is that I want to take us to the events of the Creation as recorded for us in the Genesis record. Then we will follow through a brief development to other places in Bible history to see the record of man's response to God's impartation of divine knowledge of how to properly steward the soil of this earth.

So what really did happen to stewardship of the Earth in the beginning?

It all started out really well for man. All he had to do was pick food from the trees, that is, all except two trees. As the object of God's Love, man was given rules so that he could demonstrate his love for God in return. What parent or child has not experienced that reality of "if you love me, you will obey me." Without rules to obey there would be no opportunity to show love and devotion to the Creator. Without question Adam was equipped by God to "tend the Garden of Eden" since it has been established that in Adam's naming of all the animals which God had created, he successfully described them with intimate knowledge as to their idiosyncratic needs for prospering in the Earth. He was fully capable of seeing to it that they all were able to "be fruitful and multiply" according to God's marvelous plan.

As to what happened, without going into great theological discussions concerning why God allowed Eve to be tempted, deceived and all the rest, let's simply agree that Adam and we would have been better off if he hadn't listened to his wife, at least that time. But more importantly, let's observe the similarity of how Adam responded and how we **all** respond to opportunities to break God's rules.

It's the simple but profound matter of pride! First Eve and then Adam determined that they could be as God. Just think, that's what is recorded of Satan's conversation with himself. We can read of his end and also the end of man who follows in his path when we too fail to forsake pride. We can observe from this very simple perspective of how God judged and punished disobedience in the Garden of Eden, a God-ordained pattern of kind reproducing after kind.

The God-given plants in the Garden now out of reach, that had given forth abundant fruit for the eating would be replaced in goodly measure with thorns and thistles **outside** the Garden. The ease of simply picking from the trees would be replaced with the sweat of the brow, which God now required if Adam was to eat. He became a tiller of the ground. He became an eater of herbs of the field. And in it all God was working a divine purpose.

Adam and all that are of the seed of Adam, would be reminded that “ from the ground you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you shall return.” The reminder was as often as Adam went to till the ground in an effort to make it produce that He and his family might eat. And then the ground placed under its’ first curse brought forth thorns and thistles. Nasty reminders of the soft tree leaves of the days in the Garden.

So what is the record of man’s stewardship of the soil after leaving the Garden?

We could go to all the university professors studies and environmental groups and amass an unbelievable accounting of the failures of man to preserve the planet and its topsoil resources. That approach does not suit my greater purpose of setting men free to obey God and His Word. Yes, we have been, and in large part continue, to be in the bondage that Adam found himself in upon being sent out of the Garden. The spirit of the man was separated from God and died. Our record as the human race, in every arena of life, is a direct result of the iniquity which then took possession of the heart of man.

The Word of God records for us even another curse in the Earth in an effort to turn the heart of man back to Himself. It was brought at the time of the judgment of sin in the days of Noah. He declared the “Great Flood” for one hundred and twenty years. Only his wife, sons and their wives repented and placed their trust in the ark, which God had directed Noah to build.

As they departed from the ark and offered sacrifices to God giving thanks for their deliverance through the flood God said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake...”. (Gen. 8:21b) In this short portion of scripture are two important messages. First, the clear indication that God has cursed the ground. To say that He would not curse it again is to say that He has just now cursed it. Secondly, this curse was for man’s sake! Somehow, whatever the nature or characteristics of this curse, it was designed by God for man’s good according to God’s Will and Purpose for man. We might well add here, it was also for His Glory and Names’ sake.

So what was man up against now with this next curse?

Well, thanks so much for asking! It is described for us right there in verse 22 of Genesis Chapter 8.

“While the Earth remains, seedtime, and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.” NKJ

This is the first clear indication of the appearance of seasons. It was in the context of the operation of the judgment against sin that God took the breathe of life out of all that walked on the earth except those eight in the ark. Even in judging sin He was Merciful and Holy. It is the first record of water appearing in the atmosphere.

So to summarize this curse, first, it would rain from the heavens downward from that day forward. Secondly, the earth because it was now tipped on its axis, would experience differential heating and cooling and cause the seasons, which we experience today. This combination of conditions is especially interesting since prior to the flood, soil and the life in the soil was watered from fountains under the surface of the ground. You might think of it as God’s trickle irrigation system- the first one and most likely the best to date. So what’s new in irrigation that God didn’t teach us! Now the water would beat down on the surface of the

earth and hail would rip at the plants and wind would whip the leaves with the raindrops and be able to totally destroy every living plant.

Further, the cold temperatures would make it impossible to grow plants year-round and the rain would wash the valuable and often limited topsoil away into the rivers and oceans of the planet.

No wonder our record hasn't been very good! What a mess we inherit!

You're right and yet see what the reaction was by God and man in the ancient world, say around three thousand years ago. Just a couple of examples should suffice. To begin the process of teaching man and demonstrating his inability to obey God, God gave Israel His Law. It included the Sabbath Year rest of the land. It was not to be planted nor pruned once in every seven years. Yet the people and livestock were free to eat of it or take whatever harvest it supplied. But the soil and the plants were to be rested.

That wasn't good enough for the Israelites. They doubted God's wisdom. They violated the Sabbath rest of the land. They lusted for more. That meant that they tilled their ground again.

God in His faithfulness sent the Prophet Isaiah to the nation Israel as recorded in Chapter 28. Beginning at verse 22 we read the accusation and the fact that if they do not forsake their ways it would bring destruction upon the whole planet and earth. Specifically we read how Israel continued to work their farmland more than necessary to be able to plant the seed. This was consistent with God's instruction.

Let's look at one modern history example in America. It was said over twenty years ago that our farming practices in Iowa had resulted in an average topsoil loss of 30 feet in depth over that entire state. To this very day we hear of growing numbers of no-till acres in major corn belt states but boasts of abated topsoil loss we cannot find. Topsoil it was stated by William Albrecht represents "the wealth of nations." It is still slipping or washing away.

And just as Isaiah spoke prophetically to Israel a rebuke and a warning of planet-wide calamity we find ourselves today quantifying the magnitude of the effects of the God ordained curse in the earth. These findings are a modern day rebuke of our efforts to obey God's command to steward the soils of the planet.

Are you suggesting that farming practices are the only cause of our high soil erosion rates?

Not by any means is agriculture the only culprit in high erosion rates of soils. Certainly paving and other forms of limiting available surface area for water in-soak increase the difficulty of run-off. Unfortunately, we cannot dismiss the role we must play in correcting the situation by merely casting aspersions at others who share our stewardship burden.

Tillage of soils is the key to unlocking the enigma of soil and earth stewardship.

Let's recap for the sake of establishing a foundation for future action in stewarding our soils. No matter where we go men till the soil. God commanded it and so it stands. Even farmers who practice what is called no-till farming methods are by the very term establishing the reality of God's command to till the ground. To practice "no-till" farming techniques is to defy the requirement of God to till the ground. The problems associated with no-till farming

practices, including the increase in certain soil-borne pathogens, insect pests and tougher weed problems will not be abated except through obedience to God's command to till the ground. His divine purposes in the command have not changed nor will they.

There is but one blessed course of action and it is to obey God's command. The question still looms as it did in the days of Isaiah; will man always err to some excess? So far, men in large part are either defying the command by using no-till practices or performing tillage operations in excess of what is required to establish the crop.

So you are saying that this technique of poking holes in the ground is what God requires?

I'm saying that it is still impossible to please God without faith. No question that the apparently simple operation called aeration requires more faith than most other tillage practices. The eye appeal of seeing turned, mixed or stirred soil certainly satisfies the flesh better. I am saying that if we had been there when God taught Adam how to till the ground, it might look a great deal like what Squanto showed the Pilgrims at Plymouth colony.

Our modern day language of farming practices has unfortunately served to confuse some of the issues. First of all, what we call tillage typically adds huge volumes of air to the topsoil. These tools should be called "aerators". Tools that in effect fracture soil but have little ability to significantly alter the air content of soil we call aerators. They should be called tillage tools.

Since we probably aren't going to alter the farming lexicon, let's look beyond the terminology to what is really accomplished through the tillage process. When we do this we will begin to discover the anatomy of the curse God pronounced when He instituted the climactic changes at the time of the Great Flood. Key of these changes was rainfall as the source of watering the earth instead of the trickle or subsurface system that was the method prior to the Great Flood.

Even if I accept the Bible record of these changes in the earth, can you prove something significant happens when water runs down through soil verse moving up through soil?

If you have ever taken an introductory soils course in college, you probably placed a sample of soil in a volume of water in a graduated cylinder and shook it until thoroughly mixed. Then you examined the results a few days later and calculated the percentages of sand silt and clay in the soil specimen. You could calculate this because the particle densities of sand, silt and clay settled at different rates to form discrete layers in the cylinder. The sand was at the bottom, then the silt and on the top were the clay particles.

We see this phenomenon in streams where the sand always settles in the inside of the bend in the stream. Sand drops sooner because it is heavier than the other particles.

When water percolates through soil it performs a separating function. By using a standard mechanical assay technique, one can determine the location of concentrations of sand, silt and clay in the tillage layer. As water percolates through soil over a period of time, it becomes obvious that silt particles move downward in the soil profile. As the water slows it drops the silt particles and they begin to collect or accumulate in a discrete layer or layers.

It is possible under certain soil moisture conditions to find this layer of silt with a rod or penetrometer. The silt layer becomes increasingly less porous and grudgingly permits exchange of soil air and water across the layer. This is identifiable by observing standing water after rainfalls in certain pockets of fields. Air is actually trapped under the silt layer and the water sits perched above the silt layer waiting for the air to move upward. The situation is reminiscent of the small-mouthed bottle trying to be filled too rapidly with water.

Now with this insight, we can begin to see the purpose of “true tillage”.

The primary purpose of tillage is to restore normal air and water exchange that soil receives both water and aboveground atmosphere. Soil air is normally high in carbon dioxide, low in nitrogen (7-8%). Roots require oxygen to grow and perform properly. Above ground atmosphere supplies the oxygen (18%) and 78% nitrogen for the growth of roots and soil microorganisms.

Traditional tillage techniques, which invert soils and mix plant materials, accomplish the basic requirements of tillage. That is the density layer is destroyed and the air/water exchange takes place efficiently after that until the density or silt layer is re-established. The question is whether it is necessary to redistribute the silt through tillage or not.

The answer to this question will bring into clear focus the operational definition of tillage. If you have seen the results of operating a minimal surface disturbance ripper you know the answer. The ripper shank penetrated the silt layer in the plow-layer as well as fracturing deeper layer of silt and perhaps tillage compaction. Enhancement or restoration of rapid water insoak did not require mixing the silt layer with the rest of the plow layer.

So it is that, as simple and useless as it might appear to “poke holes in the ground”, the impact it has of restoring air/water exchange accomplishes the fundamental purposes of tillage.

And are you trying to tell me God planned all of this?

When Jesus looked forward to the day of His return for His Bride, the Church, He asked whether “the Son of Man would find faith in the earth.” Think about it for a minute. The first thing God told Adam to do when sin had separated him from God was to till the ground from which he had been formed. Then at the occasion of the flood it became more incumbent on man to obey since God had now placed a curse in the earth or reversed the direction of water through the soils of the planet.

Then we have the record in Isaiah’s day of how Israel had gone off in their own way. They had violated the Sabbath rest of the land and were over-tilling their land.

Now today you are responsible for what you have read here. What will you do concerning God’s command to till the ground? He is coming back for a people who have exhibited faith in Him and they will have proved it by their obedience.