

## What Is Climate Change and What Are Its Consequences?



### Opening Prayer

"Put your ear to the ground and listen,  
 hurried, wearied footsteps,  
 bitterness, rebellion.  
 Hope  
 hasn't yet begun.  
 Listen again.  
 Put out feelers.  
 The Lord is there.  
 God is far less likely  
 to abandon us  
 in hardship  
 than in times of ease."

-Dom Helder Camara, from The Desert is Fertile

### Bible Study (10 - 15 minutes)

Our scriptures, and perhaps our entire human history, are stocked with stories of disasters (often of our own human making) followed by deliverance. Biblical examples include:

- The Genesis flood followed by the Noahic Covenant with all life,
- Enslavement in Egypt followed by Exodus to the promised land,
- Jesus Christ's crucifixion followed by resurrection and ascension,
- Paul the persecutor turned into Paul the apostle

What other remarkable turnarounds com to mind?

Do you agree that we need a remarkable turnaround now, from environmental destruction to environmental justice?

One of the great but less-often noticed turnarounds in our scripture happened in the Babylonian exile, in the sixth century BCE. Nowhere is that transformation more focused than in Ezekiel 34. Almost everything said and done by the exiled prophet Ezekiel before Ezekiel 34.10 is doom and desolation. Almost everything after 34.12 is hope and renewal. Read aloud some of the last things Ezekiel said about the disaster in his day and its causes: (Ez 34.2-10, 18)

*"Thus says the LORD God, 'Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should shepherds not feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaugh-*

*ter the fatlings, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd. . . .’ “Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must also tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of cool water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?”*

**Question to Discuss:** Ezekiel spoke this indictment of the “shepherds” (rulers, persons entrusted with privilege, power, and responsibility) in about 586 BCE. What does this speak to us “stewards” (managers, persons entrusted with privilege, power, and responsibility) today about environmental degradation? How have we like shepherds gone astray?

Yet God in Ezekiel makes the pivot especially in verse 15, *“I myself will be the shepherd of the sheep.”* (an identity which Jesus owned for himself especially in John 10.11-16). Read now the first of the new things Ezekiel declares must come (Ex 34.25-27a)

*“I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. I will make of them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; when they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of those who enslaved them.”*

**Question to Discuss:** Never mind the poor foxes, bears and jaguars; Ezekiel doesn’t mean they’ll disappear, only that they won’t imperil humans. But Ezekiel is probably speaking of what we would call regenerative agriculture here, and much more besides. What does a redeemed world and humanity look like in Ezekiel’s prophesy? What is our role in that world?

### Climate Change Discussion (10 - 15 minutes)

When did you personally become aware that climate change is a serious problem?

Are you convinced that the climate change that is occurring is due primarily to human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels?

**Video Presentation** (17 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcbJtWQNzeI&t=7s>

### Questions for discussion (20 - 25 minutes)

In the future how do you see climate change affecting

⇒ this country?

⇒ you personally?

⇒ your children or grandchildren?

## Additional Activities

**Go outside and look around.** What changes do you predict will occur in 50 years?  
What feelings do you have when you contemplate the changes that will come?

Read Psalm 38 (it's pretty much a pure lament, a cry for help.)

- ⇒ Ask each participant to identify with some kind of creature on God's earth – a sapling, a coyote, a sand dune, a rock, whirlpool, whatever, so long as it is some real earthly particular thing they can picture.
- ⇒ Ask each to imagine their creature as affected by climate change. (Easy if they are a polar bear, different if they are a hurricane, but just, how they feel in the face of climate change.)
- ⇒ Ask them to pick one verse or part of one verse in Psalm 38 that expressed their experience as they face climate change.
- ⇒ Ask each to briefly share with the group,
  - ◇ “My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (might be some personal name, Jake, might be some species, yarrow, ursus horribilus, might be some combination. “I’m Jake, a Jackal.””
  - ◇ The verse I feel as I face the realities of climate change is. . . .,
  - ◇ Why I chose that verse is. . .
  - ◇ What I hope for myself and my kind is. .

Leader wraps it up with silent, then spoken prayer. . .and the closing verse 22, “Make haste to help me, O LORD, my salvation.”

## Closing Prayer

When the animals come to us  
asking for our help,  
will we know what they are saying?  
When the plants speak to us  
in their delicate, beautiful language,  
will we be able to answer them?  
When the planet herself  
sings to us in our dreams,  
will we be able to wake ourselves, and act?  
Gary Lawless, in Earth Prayers from Around the World

## Bibliography

Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2018

A call to people of faith to respond to the moral challenge of climate change by a leading climate activist and United Church of Christ minister. In this book Jim Antal makes a compelling case that it is time for the church to meet the challenge of the climate crisis and suggests new approaches to worship, preaching, witnessing and other spiritual practices that honor creation and cultivate hope.

Mark Lynas, *Our Final Warning: Six Degrees of Climate Emergency*, 4<sup>th</sup> Estate, 2020

Predicts the consequences of each additional degree of global warming up to six degrees of warming. The author writes “The situation has become desperately urgent and nobody who reads this will be able to say they didn’t know what was coming”.

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, Tim Duggan Books, 2019

An alarming description of the many ways in which climate change will impact our lives in future years. However, as the author has said, “We *should* be alarmed”. His grim dystopian vision of the near - future has shocked many people, but has been meticulously researched.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)

A good summary of the latest (2018) IPCC special report can be found at the coolearth website [www.coolearth.org](http://www.coolearth.org).

Interfaith Power and Light website, [www.interfaithpowerandlight.org](http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org)

Oakland based Interfaith Power and Light “inspires and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to take bold and just action on climate change”

Citizens Climate Lobby, [www.citizensclimatelobby.org](http://www.citizensclimatelobby.org),

Citizens Climate Lobby is building support in Congress for a national bipartisan solution to climate change.

350.org

350.org is “ a grassroots global movement working to unite the world around solutions to the climate crisis”. It is named after 350 parts per million—the safe concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Their website provides many resources, including training tools, graphics and visuals and videos.

[www.INSIDEClimateNews.org](http://www.INSIDEClimateNews.org), a free weekly newsletter on climate change and the environment

[www.ClimateNexus.org](http://www.ClimateNexus.org) a free daily summary of climate news

Global Weirding is a PBS video series on climate change written and narrated by climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe. The videos are available on You Tube.

More resources can be found on the Environmental Science Degree Program website

[www.environmentalsciencedegree.com](http://www.environmentalsciencedegree.com), which provides a comprehensive list of 101 climate science web resources