

Who Controls the Weather?

If you run out of small talk, you can always talk about the weather. When you get up in the morning, you check what kind of day it is. People have always been fascinated by weather forecasts and climate change. They pay careful attention to weather reports. Some even constantly watch the AllWeather channel on TV. We hear about tornadoes which can rip trees out by their roots, derail trains, sweep people into the air, and destroy buildings.

On May 29, 1986, twelve school children in west China were sucked up by a tornado. It put them down again on some sand dunes 20 km (12 miles) away - completely unharmed. In the summer of 1979 the Christian Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario, was totally destroyed by a tornado. "Freakish" Weather.

The year 2002 will go down in history as a "freakish" weather year. Douglas Lecomte, a drought specialist with the U.S. National Weather Service says, "Colorado and Arizona just had their driest June through May period in 107 years. Across the West, rainfall has been less than half of normal." In Arizona, where higher temperatures were one factor behind the biggest fire in that state's history, thousands of residents were moved. "We're at the mercy of Mother Nature right now," said Larry Humphrey, a firefighting commander at Arizona's biggest blaze. In Canada, drought hounded much of the prairies, despite floods in southern Alberta. Canada's Environment Minister David Anderson pointed to the flooding near Lethbridge, Alberta (attributed to high rains and a heavy snow), the raging fires in Northern Alberta and the drought and saw them as concerns as signs of global warming.

The weather has contributed to the downfall of empires. A great ally in Russia wars is "General Winter." A Russian prisoner warned Napoleon, "Sir, in a month our cold will make your fingernails fall out." To his regret, Napoleon failed to pay attention to the prophetic words. His grand army had to retreat in the intolerable Russian winter. Napoleon's chief of staff, Marshall Berthier, reported: "The whole army is completely disbanded - even the 400 men who are all that is left of the Garde Imperiale. Twenty-five degrees of cold and heavy snow on the ground are the cause of the disastrous state of the army, which no longer exists." Hitler's armies met the same fate as Napoleon's. When winter came in 1941, with its killing frost, more German soldiers died of bitter cold than from Russian bullets and bayonets.

"General Winter" can be an ally in war, but can also increase the suffering of the oppressed. While France, Belgium and the southern part of the Netherlands were already liberated from the Nazis during 1944, the liberation of the northern part of the Netherlands did not come until May 1945 after a severe winter of famine.

Weather and World-Views

Who controls the weather? The answer to this question depends on one's world-view. Secularism, the dominant condition of our Western culture - and to a large extent of the

whole world - impacts values, human relationships, and even the way we think about the weather. It deprives modern science of its spiritual foundations. The supernatural understanding of the world is replaced by a naturalistic one. Who still thinks of God when we listen to the weather reports? What is the weather from a secular perspective? It has been defined "as the atmospheric conditions prevailing at a specific place and time driven by the interactions of the atmosphere, water in the atmosphere and on the earth (oceans, rivers, lakes), and the solid earth, all driven by solar energy from the sun."

But secularism is not only a condition, it is also a deeply rooted faith in the illusion that man can live without God and take control of his own destiny. Although the weather fronts are still unpredictable and uncontrolled as centuries ago, the development of weather-modification technology is still progressing. The United Nations has taken note of its negative consequences. Its Charter states, "using environmental modification techniques to destroy, damage or injure another state [is] prohibited." On May 18, 1977, it banned altering weather in war and called specifically for the environment's improvement and peaceful use. Nevertheless military planners of nations that possess advanced technology still work on weather-modification as an option. They believe that artificially created weather patterns can influence enemy battle actions, and also change the behavior and living patterns of an entire population.

Although modern secular thinkers live with the self-deception that they do not need God, at the practical level they still fill the gap left by the rejection of the true God with surrogate gods. When the world tries to live without God, it becomes a weird and homeless place. No wonder that today ancient and new gods are mushrooming. As the polemicist and extremely versatile author G.K. Chesterton observed, "People who don't believe in something can be persuaded to believe in anything." It may seem astonishing, but astrology, which fell into disrepute in the 18th century, has now staged an amazing revival in the 21st century - a century of high tech, space flights, and satellites in order to take close-up photographs of Saturn. The New Age faith in astrology assents that the course of the planets determines life on this earth to the smallest detail and even our lives are under the sway of the stars. Horoscope charts in magazines and newspapers are daily consulted in the hope of gaining some knowledge about the future. Astrology is even applied to learning about weather conditions! Many people have more interest in what the stars have to say about the weather than in finding the hand of God in nature. In other words, in an age in which man declares himself free from God, he surrenders his will to the dictatorship of the stars.

The Weather and Satan

In Christian circles there is no unanimity on who controls the weather. Some evangelicals believe that Biblical stories illustrate Satan's power over the weather. For example, one author states that the devil was responsible for the storm on the lake in Mark 4 involving Jesus and His disciples. In *Satan's Devices*, Robert Morey states: "Both God and Satan can manipulate the weather. In Mark 4: 37, I believe with many commentators that Satan sent a violent storm to kill Jesus while He was asleep on the

boat. It was rebuked because Satan was trying to kill Him. Satan also caused a great wind to come and knock down the house and kill Job's children. (Job 1: 18,19)" In an article *Who Makes it Rain? A Question of Biblical Authority*, Kevin Cain tells about missionaries who give Satan credit for controlling the weather! Often it is because of a rainstorm. They speculate that Satan must have caused a rainstorm to ruin an outdoor event that the missionary believed was in God's will to run smoothly.

Scripture and the course of history since the Fall testify that Satan is a figure of great power. "We must not underestimate the power of the world of demons; we ordinarily think far too little of them," says K. Popma. "To be sure, they can do no more than what God permits, but let us not forget that they are by nature servants of mankind and thus know much about us and are able to affect us greatly through their rebellion and sabotage of God's plan."

But Satan does not have the power to affect the weather. Only God does. Satan cannot do anything without God's approval. He still needs God's permission for everything he undertakes. The Bible affirms that God restricts the operation of Satan in His creation. Nowhere does it concede to the forces of darkness. It repeatedly emphasizes that God never suffers evil to get out of hand. He controls it; He restricts it. Satan is bound.

God in Control

Who controls the weather? God the Creator does! In His revelation of Himself in His Son God, enlightens us about ourselves and the world because nothing has meaning other than in the Son. In Christ everything is created and through Him all things are redeemed (Col. 1: 15-20) In the matchless story of creation recorded in Genesis 1 we see the light flashing out of the darkness as God said, "Let there be light!" He created the world in freedom, out of nothing. He called it into existence. It is upheld and governed by Him. He is personally involved and takes full responsibility for His creation. It is He whose hand is directly at work in it, and He is not dependent upon any planet or any force of nature. He established the natural laws governing His universe when He created it. We indeed live in a God-ordered world. Through His creation God has revealed His eternal power. As G. K. Chesterton aptly said, "The sun does not rise because of the rotation of the earth. The sun rises because God says to it "Get up."

Neither the secular mindset, nor astrologers, nor Satan can direct the weather patterns or have perfect weather predictions. Nothing is more important for God's people than to be firmly convinced that God is in control. This is a rich comfort for us. In Scripture we hear that the God who controls the events of

nature also thinks of us. God is the One, as a poet said,

Who points the clouds their course,

Whom the winds and seas obey,

He shall direct thy wandering feet, He shall prepare thy way.

God never lets the weather run its own course. From the beginning God controlled it. Before He created man "the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth"(Gen. 2:5). God's hand in the weather patterns is clearly seen in the account of Noah and the

Flood. When the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart had become evil all the time (Gen.6: 5), He decided to destroy the whole earth and the wicked by a flood. God told Noah to build the ark on land, far from rivers and seas, while the weather was peaceful, the sun brightly shining, not a cloud in the sky, the weather forecasters predicting continual sunny days ahead. When Noah had finished the ark, God sent the rain to float it. He said, "I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights (Gen.7: 4). Righteous Noah did not fear the elements. He knew that he was safe with God even in the external things. He knew that God had control over this catastrophic flood.

Although we often don't understand the why and wherefores of flooding, earthquakes, and "freakish weather," at any given time, the Bible assures us that nothing happens by chance. John Frame points out that God is the ultimate explanation of everything. The Biblical writers do not hesitate to ascribe the events of the natural world directly to God. For example, the Psalmists testify of God's hand in nature. He waters the land (Ps. 65:9-11). He sends the lightning and the wind (Ps. 135: 5-7). He spreads the snow, frost, and hail and then sends out His Word to melt them (Ps. 147:15-18). Psalm 19 tells us that the sun is a servant of the Lord, a minister for our good. Psalm 104 gives a fresh vision of the beauty of the clouds and the grandeur of the sea. The author of this psalm describes the glories of God making springs pour water into ravines, making the grass grow for cattle, and rebuking the Red Sea so that it dried up. Our Lord said of our heavenly Father that He makes the sun rise and sends the rain (Matt. 5:45).

Blessing and Judgment

In the course of Israel's history, God blessed His people with good weather for a favourable harvest; but He also chose rain and other forms of weather conditions to communicate His displeasure with them. In 2 Samuel 12: 18, the Lord sent thunder and rain to demonstrate His power so that His people would fear Him. Elijah told wicked king Ahab, "As the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). When God was ready, He proclaimed through His prophet, "I will send rain on the face of the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). The prophet Jeremiah spoke of "a land not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2). He said that because of God's anger at Israel's sins, "the land mourns and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up"(Jeremiah 23:10).

Conclusion

Who controls the weather? No one should be so presumptuous to think that mankind can control it through technology. Furthermore, those who consult astrology for weather forecasts commit idolatry. Isaiah declared, "Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves" (Isaiah 47:13b, 14a). And those evangelicals who believe Satan is in control attribute to him powers which he does not possess.

As I have shown, the Bible clearly shows that on the one hand, the knowledge that God is in absolute control - and that we may trust Him completely - offers comfort and joy to God's people (Cf. Lord's Day 10). God is fulfilling His purposes. He is renewing His fallen creation and building His Kingdom. On the other hand, when we think about the weather and the decadent age in which we live, the German theologian Helmut Thielicke's warning ought to be heeded:

And therefore this world, which we think we govern by our own power, may one day come crashing down upon us, because the thing we play so presumptuously has gotten beyond our control, and because God is not to be mocked. He may suddenly cease to hold the ocean in check and the unleashed elements will sweep us into their vortex.

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