

# Population: How Near the Limits?

The world's population is expected to double in the next century to the inevitable 10 billion. According to the U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, WORLD POPULATION PROFILE, every 2 seconds 9 babies are born and only 3 people die. In other words, while you are reading this newsletter the Earth's population will increase by over 2,000. In fact, the world population growth per hour equals 10,600.

The consequences are boggling. "Today the Green Revolution falters, ecosystems are badly degraded and fresh-water supplies continue to shrink. Refugees produced by population pressures in Africa and Asia already threaten to destabilize nations." (TIME, June 17, 1994) Some would predict "a world of growing chaos, anarchy, disease and corruption as hungry refugees surge across borders in search of food and nations fight over scarce resources." (U.S. News&World Report, September 12, 1994). "Imagine a world in the not too distant future that teems with 17 billion people. Virulent plagues sweep the planet. Wars are fought to control not oil, but fields of wheat. It would not take much to trigger such an apocalypse" (TIME, September 5, 1994) "If governments continue to fiddle while human numbers explode, it becomes ever more likely the horsemen of famine, disease and anarchy will have their day."(TIME, June 17, 1994)

The United Nations' International Conference on Population & Development in Cairo this September contrived a 20-year action program which some 180 countries were expected to endorse. This conference was planned to consider ways of averting human and environmental catastrophes. However, the conference was attacked by the Vatican and its "newfound Islamic allies" as promoting a "project of systematic death" because it offers safe abortions. Other issues such as, "women's empowerment" and the relationship of poverty to large families emerged. In the end, no country voted against the final draft of the 113-page plan calling on governments to commit \$17 billion annually by the year 2000 to the cause of curbing population growth. Still no matter what actions the nations are able to take to curb the population explosion, the Earth's population is almost certain to double in fifty years.

## Did God Miscalculate?

Is there some miscalculation on God's part regarding the Earth being adequate for humanity's home? How can there be enough food for everybody? How can the environment support the thronging billions today? And if the Scriptures also teach a resurrection of Earth's dead billions to a Millennial Kingdom on Earth, isn't this promised Kingdom totally impractical?

God commissioned the first pair in the Garden of Eden: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28, NEW AMERICAN STANDARD). For 6,000 years the divine command has been in process of fulfillment. If babies are still being

born, confidence and faith in God's foresight would indicate that the Earth has not reached its capacity for population.

## **Large Population, A Recent Phenomenon**

Up to the mid-1800s, the population of the earth has been relatively low. Only in the last one hundred years or so has the Earth's population reached 1 billion. In other words, the number of people living in the twentieth century is comparable to all the people who have ever lived since the earliest civilizations. In AD 1 the world's population was about 200 million and stayed about the same till 1850 when it reached up to 1 billion. In 1975 it shot up to 4 billion and in 1993, it topped 5.5 billion (THE WORLD ALMANAC:1994, p. 499). Therefore, only recently has Thomas Malthus' 18th century projections of doom actually become the overpopulation specter which could threaten humanity.

When God commissioned the first pair to "fill" the Earth, did not He justly and lovingly provide an adequate Home for humanity? Yes, He did, but when Adam and Eve sinned, they were not only were condemned, but also their home—the Earth—was cursed (Genesis 3:17-19):

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground.

As a result, Earth became a very inhospitable Home to man. But if the Earth's productivity had not been diminished, the abundant yields would have given Man too much time to get into more trouble than he did anyway. Thus man, for most centuries of human history has laboriously eked out a living from the stubborn soil.

Since the end of the last century, however, the agricultural scene changed dramatically. And today, instead of walking behind a plough and ox, the farmer may sit in his air-conditioned cab and while listening to CD's of Bach in stereo, he plants seeds or harvests all day. Almost. Many of the Third World countries still farm primitively. Nevertheless, famines in these countries are just as much the result of politics and greed as they are from shortage of rain and lack of technology.

Grain is in surplus. Forty-six million acres of U.S. farmland and 11 million acres in Europe have been deliberately idled under government programs to boost farmers' incomes. Are problems of food shortages and population really based on the size and capacity of the Earth?

Experts say that the ecological capacity of the Earth—set by available land, climate and sunlight for photosynthesis—is sufficient to produce food not just for 10 billion, but a staggering 1,000 billion people. (U.S. NEWS, September 12, 1994) One liberal estimate of the number of people who have lived since the beginning of creation is approximately

252 billion. Even then, allowing ten square feet for each individual, they could all fit in the state of Texas. (THE DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES, pp. 160, 161)

But still we see wrenching scenes of starvation, masses of refugees and the hapless homeless on our television news. We wonder why if we have the technology and room to provide for the needs of man, will Man ever learn to share? Is the Earth still "cursed"?

## **Earth—God's Footstool**

The LORD said, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool and I will make the place of my feet glorious" (Isaiah 66:1; 60:13). The "curse" laid on the Earth in Eden will be lifted in God's Kingdom on Earth. "And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him" (Revelation 22:3).

When the "ransomed of the Lord shall return," the wilderness shall be habitable and "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:10,1). Man will "return" to where he was. Not heaven. Man, as represented in Adam, was in a perfect Garden of Eden. Man was ejected from this paradise on Earth. He worked with the "thorns and thistles" and eventually died in sorrow. But the Scriptures say, "The earth shall yield her increase" (Ezekiel 34:27). In the Kingdom, Adam and his children will "return" to an uncursed, blossoming, glorious Earth. Not only will there be enough space for food production, but for flowers!

What does it mean that Man should "subdue" the Earth? And what is the "dominion" that he lost over the Earth and will regain? As the full establishment of the Kingdom approaches, man is already subduing the Earth. He is probing its secrets and discovering new and better grains and rices—as well as ways to preserve the Earth's ecological balance and integrity. These advances in technology are not because Man is "smarter" now, but because this is the due time for increasing knowledge in the "time of the end" (Daniel 12:1-4). In the genetic engineering of better variations of food products, scientists are not actually creating "new" strains but may be merely re-connecting heartier, superior strains lost after the "curse" on this planet Earth.

It would seem that we are catching glimpses of the incredible potential of Earth now, but that in the meantime real solutions by man are prevented because of greed, politics, and money.

## **Neither Marry**

At the population conference in Cairo, the related problems of poverty, gender equality, women empowerment, birth control and abortions emerged as significant factors in population control. Although the draft resolution passed, is implementation realistic in each nation and culture? In each family? What solutions may we expect from our great Creator on the many-faceted dilemma of over-population?

Even if conditions in God's Kingdom on Earth are to be like the Garden of Eden, a limit as to the capacity of the Earth as Man's Home would have to eventually reach a limit. Since God commissioned the first pair to "fill the earth," this request would imply that sometime in the future the earth would be filled to capacity. Exactly what does God have in mind for birth control?

When Jesus was asked whose wife would the woman (who had seven husbands) be in the resurrection, he answered, "The children of this world marry and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:33-35). The sex division between Adam and Eve was merely for the propagation of the race and not a permanent arrangement. When the Earth is filled to capacity—including room for all those who died in Adam to be resurrected—the marriage arrangement, as Jesus said, will become obsolete. Since the Millennial Kingdom is a program of gradual rehabilitation and reconstruction, no doubt marriage will gradually and naturally dissolve.

Man will be one family. The Earth will be abundantly fruitful. While this promise may not be literal, the prophecy (Micah 4:1-4) would certainly indicate enough food and space for everyone:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain [Kingdom] of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains [man's kingdoms] they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. Energy devoted toward the military will be converted to agriculture. Economic security and human dignity will be the inheritance of every single human being that has ever lived:

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.     Isaiah 65:17

In spite of the gloomy outlook of our Earth supporting a burgeoning population, God is in control. Man may have almost reached his limits, but God has an all-encompassing Plan of blessing Man. Man will not be allowed to destroy himself and his Earth with overpopulation. (Neither will God burn up the whole Earth as some may tell us.) God has no limits to His wisdom nor lack of power to execute His promises. "The Earth abideth forever."