

These are the dire consequences of seeing the world that exists today having its origination in Genesis 1:1.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the timing and effects of the curse. It has been demonstrated that the futility of nature was not as God had designed it, and the corruption refers to the physical decay of systems. The timing of this event must have taken place in Genesis 3:14-19 when Adam sinned. If this belief is held, then consistent Christian theology can result. If not, then one must blame God for all the ills of the world.

References

1. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 69
2. The six are: Acts 14:15; I Corinthians 3:20; I Corinthians 15:17; Titus 3:9; James 1:26; I Peter 1:18.
3. The three are: Romans 8:20; Ephesians 4:17; II Peter 2:18.
4. See Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:7.
5. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains*, 2nd ed., 1:625. A portion of a footnote on p. 620 is of importance here: "Another danger in dealing with meanings of value is to assume that nominal and adjectival forms are essentially equivalent in meaning, but this is by no means always the case."
6. See Acts 4:25; I Corinthians 15:10,14,58; II Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:2; Ephesians 5:6; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 2:8; I Thessalonians 2:1; 3:5; James 2:20.
7. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "Mataios."
8. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. "Mataiotes."
9. James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 470.
10. Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (1880; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 182.
11. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1980), 1:413.
12. H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), 196.

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...If you call out for Insight...

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You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
Based on Proverbs 2:3-5

Creation and The Curse

by James Stambaugh, M.DIV.*

Have you ever seen a National Geographic special that featured a lioness chasing a gazelle and eventually eating it? As the gazelle is fleeing for its life, one can see the terror in its eyes. We ourselves react negatively to news of a natural disaster in which many are killed and suffer, both physically and emotionally. We accept these tragedies, but through it all there seems to be an unspoken assumption that our world has always been the way we currently see it. This assumption has caused many to question the reality of God's existence or God's goodness. The question might be stated: "If God exists, why does He allow His creation to suffer physical and moral evil? He either must not be powerful enough to deal with evil, or else He does not care enough to deal with it." This is called "the problem of evil." The issue casts doubt on the character and ability of God; it lays the blame for the present condition of His creation at His feet. Today there are a growing number of Christians who directly insist that God, not man, is to blame for the condition of the world. Observe how one man puts it:

While the sin we human beings commit causes us all naturally to react negatively to decay, work, physical death, pain, and suffering, and while ultimately all this is somehow tied to God's plan to conquer sin permanently, there is nothing in Scripture that compels us to conclude that none of these entities existed before Adam's first acts of rebellion against God. On the other hand, God's revelation through nature provides overwhelming evidence that all these aspects did indeed exist for a long time period previous to God's creating Adam.¹

We Christians need to understand the nature and timing of God's curse on the creation. Its announcement is presented in Genesis 3, but Paul's commentary on it in Romans 8:19-21 is the key to our understanding of this event. We need to determine when Paul said it occurred and to what extent its effect was spread.

The Meaning of "Vanity"

The first step in examining the word "vanity" (Romans 8:19) is to note its meaning and use. The Greek word *mataios* and its derivatives appear 11 times in the New Testament. The noun, *mataios*, translated "vain" or "vanities" in the KJV is used six times.² The adjective, *mataiotes*, translated "vanity" occurs three times.³ The adverb *maten*, translated "in vain" appears twice.⁴ One lexicon

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identifies both the noun and adjective in terms of "value" and so defines them "useless, futile, empty."⁵ It is interesting to note that this adjective is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word, *hebel*, in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Our English translations reflect the word as "vanity of vanities."

The idea of "vanity" can be stated in the two Greek words, *kenos* and *mataios*, and it is interesting to observe their 6 similarities and differences. The word *kenos*, frequently translated "vain,"⁶ is often used to convey a similar notion to *mataios*. The only time they appear in a common text is I Corinthians 15. Paul uses *kenos* in verses 10 and 14 and *mataios* in verse 17. Paul uses these words to convey the following meanings: "*kenos* means 'vain' because something is without content; *mataios* means 'vain' because something is deceptive or ineffectual."⁷ Thus, as Paul uses these contrasting words, *kenos* refers to the concept of a faith or grace that is void of content, whereas something that is *mataios*, while appearing to be useful in all reality it is not! This is important when Paul uses the adjective in Romans 8; nature appears to be functioning as God designed, but in reality it is not.

Paul uses the noun form in Romans 8:20, and it is defined as "emptiness, futility, purposelessness, and transitoriness."⁸ The adjective form appears to take the idea of deception and adds connotation. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon seems to focus entirely on living his life without a thought of God. The Septuagint uses the adjective form to convey the thought of "vanity." The point that Solomon wants the reader to observe is that one can live his life disobeying God, but this type of life does not fulfill any need and is evil in the eyes of God. The lifestyle that Ecclesiastes presents might seem on the surface to be fulfilling, but that is merely a deception. So Ecclesiastes seems to reinforce both points, that this life is deceptive and is against God's commands. The New Testament also seems to connect with *mataios* the idea of being against God. In the two other places where writers use this word, *mataios*, it refers to that which is against God's commands. Paul uses this word in Ephesians 4:17 to encourage the believers not to live like the Gentiles who use their minds to construct more sinful activity. The Ephesians lived in a way that they thought would be beneficial, but it was not, and it also was disobedient. This word also appears in II Peter 2:18 where it describes the false teachers' speech patterns. Peter also brings both concepts together, deception and disobedience, with the word, *mataios*, "vain or empty." Many have thought that "vanity," *mataios*, refers to something which has no purpose. However, Dunn notes that "the creation is *mataios* in the sense of an object which does not function as it was designed to do."⁹ Thus nature, man's lifestyle, and man's speech, all were originally designed to exist in compliance with God's will or plan. Now these three things are called *mataios*, because they do not function as they were originally designed, yet they give the outward appearance of proper function. So it appears that the word has some sort of an ethically deceptive idea as related to God's will or plan. Along this line Trench notes: "One must, in part at least, have been delivered from the *mataios*, to be in a condition at all to esteem it for what it truly is."¹⁰ We make a grave mistake of thinking that nature is functioning properly when we do not take into account God's curse on the creation.

The Timing of the "Vanity" and "Corruption"

The timing can be observed in the word "subjected." It refers to an event completed in the past when the creation was acted upon by some outside agent. The verb "subjected" is in the passive voice, which means that there was an outside force putting upon the whole creation this futility and bondage of corruption. Paul uses an impersonal passive to veil God's presence, but there is little doubt that God is the agent at work in this verb.¹¹

The verb is in the aorist tense, which is used to refer to an event in the past. The Greek aorist tense may be viewed as suggesting various kinds of events. It would appear in Romans 8:20 that Paul used a "culminative aorist," which means that he "wished to view an event in its entirety, but to regard it from the viewpoint of its existing results."¹² Paul would have used this culminative aorist to view the creation as a whole living under the conditions of being "subjected to futility." So we seem to be left with two options as to when this "subjected" event might have taken place. The first is in Genesis 3:14-19, where, because of Adam's sin, God pronounced judgment upon mankind, the plants and animals, and the earth. The second option might be to place this "subjection" in the very beginning at Genesis 1:1.

If one were to place the timing of this event in Genesis 1:1, how does this affect Christian theology? If God cursed creation from the beginning, there can be no valid answer to "the problem of evil," for death, pain, and suffering are universally considered to be "evil," and will be removed (Revelation 21:4) in the "new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Peter 3:13).

The Bible states that God created everything in an idyllic fashion ("very good," according to Genesis 1:31). The earth, animals, and man cooperated in harmony and peaceful coexistence. God gave man the freedom of choice—to choose to obey or disobey Him. However, if we view the timing of Romans 8:19-21 as dating from Genesis 1:1, we can offer no credible defense for a belief in a God who is good, loving, just, and merciful, for this "groaning" world was His plan.

It appears that those who have blamed God for the present evil world are ignoring two other concepts in the discussion. First, God must create that which is consistent with His person. If God created a world in which the creatures that inhabit it must suffer from evil (at least physical and emotional), then this evil has been present from the very beginning. This means that God is either powerless to do away with this kind of world or that He enjoys seeing His creatures suffer. A god who could create the world "subjected to vanity and corruption" is exactly like all the other gods of the ancient world—cruel, vicious, and capricious. In short, this god is not the God of the Bible. Second, there would be no way that God could have prevented Satan and Adam from encountering the effects of this "vanity and corruption." So when Satan and his angels, and later Adam, disobeyed God they were simply doing that which was consistent with creation around them. Thus, God did not, or could not, have played fair with either being. Neither Satan nor Adam really had the freedom of choice because the "corruption" would also have had such an effect on them volitionally and spiritually that they could do nothing else but sin. This also affects the pastoral ministry today, for the pastor has nothing to say to those who are suffering. God created the world in such a way that they would suffer. There would be no ministry of consoling those who mourn, for God enjoys their weeping.