

Youth Bible Study on Climate Change



Teaching Objective: Students will learn that God is the creator of the world and humans have been empowered to care for the creation. They will learn that climate change is real, caused by humans, and has dangerous implications for our future. They will explore ways we can respond to the climate crisis.

Estimated Time: 75 minutes (You may want to divide into two lessons)

Introduction:

Question: Who can tell me what Climate Change is?

- Let students respond

Question: How do conversations about climate change make you feel?

- Let students respond.

What is Climate Change?

Show video link done by C3 Science consultant, Robert Davies.
(4 minutes): <https://youtu.be/nIS4RoVPb1E>

Question: What are the 3 elements in which Dr. Davies said there is scientific consensus?

Answer:

1. Climate is changing (getting warmer)
2. It is human caused
3. It presents dangerous risks for humankind.



Question: How does this fit with what you are learning in school?

- Let students respond

Question: How does this fit with what you are learning at church and home?

- Let students respond

What are the risks to humans?

Possible Answer: If it's getting hotter, it's getting drier. We dry clothes in the sun or the dryer to get them dry. Drying happens faster this way. The soil will get dryer.

Out west in California and Arizona, they are already having major, multi-year droughts that are damaging crops. In Africa, people are already literally starving to death, because of extreme droughts, interrupted by devastating floods, then extended periods of drought again.

Climate scientists create "models" to predict how hot the earth's climate is going to be in the future. There are multiple models because we don't know how humans are going to respond to climate change. We don't know everything that will happen in the future. However, scientists have created some very helpful models to show us how hot it will be in the years to come. These models show the earth is going to get hotter from 4 to 13 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of this century. So, let's try an exercise to think about our own future.

Have a timeline on white paper or a white board. Have the years posted on the timeline from the current year and in equal increments for another 100 years. (For example, draw your timeline from 2020 until 2120, marking with 10 year increments. Have all the students draw a mark on the timeline indicating how long they believe they are going to live. Of course, no one knows for sure, so this is simply an educate estimate.

After the students make their mark, ask: **Who would like to tell us where you put your mark and why?** Let students respond.

What are Climate Projections?

Let's look at some Climate Projections presented by Dr. Robert Davies here: <https://youtu.be/JbjS6V3EGPA>

Question: What strikes you most in this 5-minute video about future projections? Let students respond.

Question: How does it make you feel? Let students respond.



Say: Dr. Davies talked about good news in this video. Did you hear that? There is good news. The good news is that our behavior as humans is the greatest variable in the projections. We have the power to literally alter the temperature of the planet. We can make it habitable or inhabitable. We have tremendous power.

- Let students discuss this bit of good news.

The Bible

Now let's see what the Bible says about this. Did you know the Bible is in agreement with scientific projections? The Bible also teaches that humankind is very powerful.

The Bible is not a science book, but it does teach us what the Hebrew people believed about God and themselves. They believed God was the most powerful force in the world. But they also believed that God had given them a lot of power. He had commissioned them to be caretakers of the earth. He had empowered them to be rulers over the earth.

The very first story in Genesis teaches us this truth. Let's take a look.

Read Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Question: What does this teach us about God?

- Let students respond

Question: When did this happen?

-Let students respond. (Of course, this is a time when you can point out we are not told "when" the beginning was. Evidently, it wasn't important for the Hebrew people to know when the beginning was. It was, however, important for them to know *Who* started the world. Science and faith address different questions. Science seeks to discover *when* the universe began. Faith addresses the question of *who* created the universe. Science and faith don't contradict one another. They complement one another.

Now let's move through the six days of creation in Genesis 1 and see what God did on the 6th day of creation.

Read Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may **rule** (*radah*) over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule** (*radah*) over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Biblical Stewardship (Part One)

“rule” comes from Hebrew word *radah*.

- Means “to rule or have dominion over”
- Loaded, powerful word
- Next time it’s used in the Bible is Leviticus, which is a warning to the Hebrews on how they are to treat the poor Hebrews who become their slaves.
- *Do not rule (radah) over them ruthlessly, but fear God”* (Lev. 25:43).

- The word *radah* is used 27 times in the OT
- Last time is a warning to the pastoral leadership of the Hebrews
- *Woe to your shepherds who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.”* The diatribe continues on and then God says, *“You have ruled (radah) them harshly and brutally.”* (Ezek. 34:1-14).
- To rule or have dominion is to have a great deal of power
- Power can be used in good and bad ways

Question: What are some bad ways we “rule” or use our power in treating the earth?

- Let students respond
- Possible responses:
 - mistreating animals, polluting the air, water and soil, etc.

Question: What are some good ways we “rule” or use our power in treating the earth?

- Let students respond
- Possible responses:
 - we take care of animals
 - we plant flowers and make our yards look pretty
 - we plant/harvest food and feed people

Summary: Christians and Jews have the following in common. We both believe the Genesis story is our story and key to our identity. We are stewards of the earth. We are caretakers on the world. We have a responsibility to use this power in a way that would please God. We should treat the world as God would treat the world.

Biblical Stewardship (Part Two)

As Christians, there is another reason we should be good stewards of the earth. It is a way to help the poor.

Read Matthew 25:31-40

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

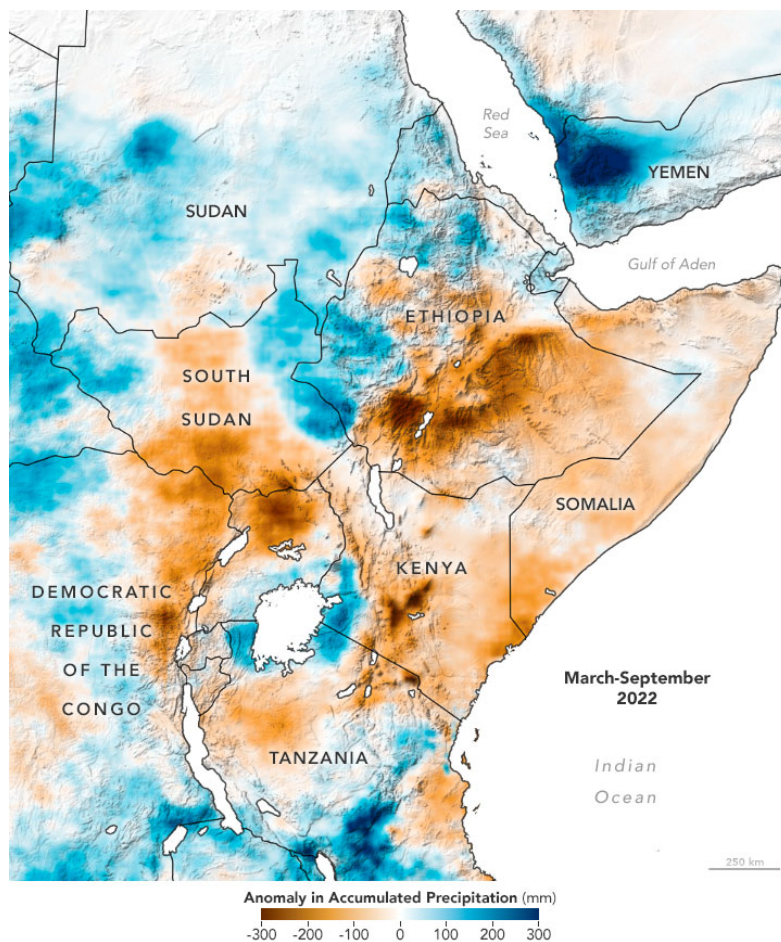
40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

This is a judgement parable. Jesus is telling us, at the end of time, we will be judged on how we treated the poor. How we cared for the hungry, thirsty, naked and imprisoned is how we cared for Jesus. Jesus will reward those who cared for these marginalized groups. He will punish those who mistreated them or ignored them.

The connection with Climate Change

The poor are the ones being most impacted by climate change. Rising sea levels are causing flooding on small islands in the Pacific Ocean. The poor people don't have the means to leave the islands. Droughts are causing subsistence farmers in Africa to leave their lands. Subsistence farmers are poor, raising enough food to feed their families and sell at a local market. The land they farm can no longer feed their families. Therefore, they are migrating from their homeland in search of lands that are more consistently productive. The poor in urban cities live with fewer trees and shade than wealthier people in the suburbs. They don't have grasses and trees to provide shade and absorb heat like those who live in greener spaces. The urban poor feel the brunt of heatwaves in our country. The heat bounces off the concrete and intensifies in the streets where there are few trees.

Opiti's Story



Opiti lives in the Horn of Africa, the eastern extension of Africa into the Indian Ocean. It consists of the nations Somalia, parts of Kenya and Ethiopia. Opiti lives in the brown region of Ethiopia in the map above. Climate change has contributed to the most severe drought in its known history in the Horn of Africa. Climate change has made the droughts extreme and the rain less predictable and more intense.

Opiti was a subsistence farmer in Ethiopia. His father farmed the land before him and his grandfather before that. In recent years, however, there has been so little rain the crops he planted never survived. If it did rain, it rained so hard, it's washed away seeds and even young plants. Opiti's family was

on the verge of starvation, so they journeyed to a refugee camp funded by the United Nations. Opiti eventually took his family and made their way north, hoping to find work, dignity and food in Egypt. They are not welcomed in Egypt because there are already so many refugees streaming in from the Horn of Africa. Opiti feels like he has disappointed his ancestral family by leaving the land they had lived on for generations. These feelings are confirmed by people in other nations who see them as people who merely want to take their already scarce resources.

Question: What would you do if you could wave a magic wand and fix this problem?

-Let students respond

Question: Is it possible for people in America to help Opiti and his family? If so, how?

-Let students respond

Question: How can our stewardship of the earth be a way to care for the poor?

-Let students respond

What can we do?

-Dr. Robert Davies said there is good news. Our behavior matters. How we live, how we respond as human beings and as a nation impacts the world. With that in mind, let's think about what we can do in our homes, schools, and churches to impact the world in a better way.

Question: What are things you can do to be good stewards of the earth?

-Let students respond: (Some possible answers.)

- Recycle
- Clean up a stream
- Build a compost at home or school or church
- Support climate change efforts in the city and country
- Educate yourself

Question: What can we do together, as a youth group?

-Let students respond

-Let students brainstorm, putting their ideas on the board

-Leave answer on the board for a while, then later lead them to make a decision and do something.

Close with Prayer:

-Let students pray for people around the world impacted by climate change.

This bible study was written by Don Gordon, founder and CEO of Christians Caring for Creation.

More Resources for More Learning:

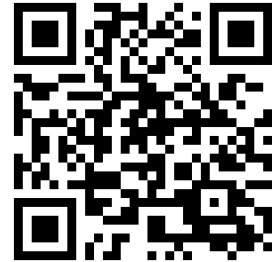
Christians Caring for Creation:

<https://ChristiansCaringForCreation.org>

<https://www.youtube.com/@christianscaringforcreation>

<https://www.facebook.com/christianscaring4creation>

<https://www.instagram.com/christianscaring4creation/>



This is a large, diverse NASA climate change online resource:

<https://climate.nasa.gov/>

This is a cool interactive map of the world, showing temperature increases over the past 150 years:

<https://climate.nasa.gov/interactives/climate-time-machine/>



New York Times article that lets students take a quiz on how their choices affect climate change:

<https://tinyurl.com/5ezdbx6j>

