

# What does the Bible say about global warming?

Sermon for Sunday, January 28, 2007  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:26-28

This is part of a series of “Sermons by request.” I’ve noted when people have asked me to talk about a particular Bible verse or a topic. Today’s message is in response to the question: “What does the Bible say about global warming?”

The short answer is, of course, “Nothing.” Maybe I should have had someone videotape today’s service, and I could submit it the Guinness Book of World Records as the shortest sermon ever.

There is a bit more to that answer, though. Just because the Bible doesn’t mention the word “politics,” does that mean God has nothing to say about how a country’s leaders are supposed to govern? Not at all!

So, while the Bible doesn’t use the term “global warming,” by no means is the Bible silent on that topic. I’ll come to that in a few minutes. Let me begin by explaining a bit about global warming. Let’s be clear, though: I am no expert on this. I’m just repeating what I’ve read.

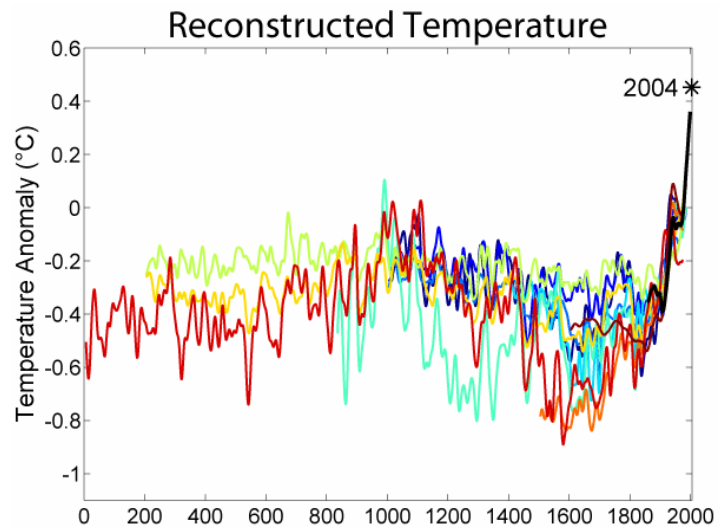
“Global warming” is the worldwide change of the temperature of the earth’s surface and atmosphere. It isn’t just about that strange warm spell we had from December right through the first two weeks of January; it’s about similar things happening around the entire planet.

There are three main points to the concern over global warming. These three points have the agreement of the large majority of the world’s scientists. However, at each point, there is a significant minority of scientists who disagree. That’s where controversy comes in.

## 1. The temperature around the world is rising

The average temperature has risen 0.6 °C since the late 1800s, but most of that has come in the last 30 years.

The graph below shows the average temperature over the last 2,000 years. (Don’t ask me how the scientists know what the temperature was like 2,000 years ago; one way has to do with measuring ocean sediments – sort of like looking at tree rings.)



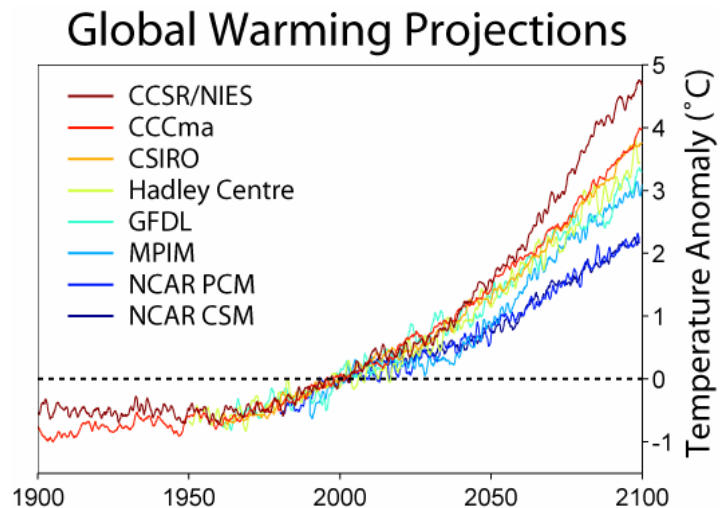
The different lines are from different methods used to estimate historic temperatures. The point is, there has always been fluctuations in temperature patterns, even large ones. But nothing like what has happened in the last one hundred years.

## 2. The temperature rise is due to human activities, particularly emissions of “greenhouse gases”

Starting about one hundred years ago, the amount of oil, gas, wood and coal being burned began increasing at a tremendous rate. This puts carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere. They work similar to the solar blanket people put on their swimming pools: these gases let sunlight through to the ground, but they keep heat from escaping back into space.

## 3. The temperature will rise several more degrees in the coming decades, unless we change

The graph below shows different projections of how the average temperature will change in the future.



Again, the different coloured lines represent different methods used to calculate this. The estimates range from about 2°C up to 5°C.

If you ask Canadians what they think about warmer winters and the lack of snow, the typical response is, “So? What’s the problem? I like not having the shovel the stuff.” Besides, an increase in temperature of 2°C or even 6°C seems insignificant to me.

However, scientists who specialize in climate and geography warn that this will cause glaciers to shrink and raise the level of the oceans. Oceans ultimately control the world’s weather, and the changes they undergo will produce more storms and the storms will be more extreme in the damage they cause.

I mentioned the controversy over these three points. Here are some areas of disagreement:

- Global climate patterns and their causes are incredibly complex, and it is beyond our ability to fully understand them.
- Increased sun activity is causing global warming.
- We are just going through a climate cycle in earth’s history. This has been going on for millions of years.
- A warmer climate will be good for the world.

Keep in mind that these disputes are put forward by scientists who are in a small minority. The great majority of scientists who have studied this are convinced: global warming is real, and it’s a huge issue.

What is the Christian response to this warning? Here’s how one preacher approached the subject:

**I heard on National Public Radio that a scientist studying global warming reports that at the current rate of melting, the ice pack on Mount Kilimanjaro will be gone in fifteen to twenty years and there will be terrible problems for the people who have relied on that melting ice as a source of water. That is just more of that environmental alarmist stuff. For the sake of future generations they want us to conserve fuel and protect endangered species. That stuff all costs money and we don’t even know if that science is correct or not. Besides, it will be a long time before that’s a real difficulty. We may leave some problems for our children and grandchildren, but didn’t our great-grandparents leave us some problems? We can’t be concerned about all these places and things.**

In other words, “It’s not my problem; let someone else worry about it.”

What *does* the Bible say about how we treat the planet?

In the book of Genesis is the account of God giving humans stewardship over the world.

**Genesis 1:26-28, New Revised Standard Version:**  
**Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”**

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

**God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”**

One way of interpreting this is that humans are superior to everything else in nature – we are the only thing that matters – and our job is to *subdue* the earth, to rule and *have dominion* over it. Trees are just lumber that hasn’t been cut up yet. Water is a commodity waiting to be dammed or bottled. Who cares if we use it all up? Jesus is coming soon, and then we won’t need trees or water. This kind of thinking is still prevalent today.

There is another way of looking at this passage. Go back and read the rest of that first chapter of Genesis. It is significant that just about every time after God makes part of the creation, the passage ends with the words, “And God saw that it was good.” God is rather fond of this world, and we have been given the job to look after it.

How do we do that? How *do* we look after the world? Just about every time I get a bill from the Hydro company, there is a brochure inside telling me how to conserve electricity:

- compact fluorescent light bulbs
- thermostats which automatically turn the heat down at night and when you’re away during the day
- weather-stripping doors and windows
- insulate walls and attics

There are lots more possibilities. Now that the Stephen Harper has suddenly turned green, I’m sure we’ll be getting something in the mail on this. Don’t just throw it out as political junk mail. Read it, and see how you can make a difference.