

[Jed suggests that](#) “the belief that climate change can’t be real because God made the earth for us to use is just one instance of a deep and old American practice of enlisting nature to uphold our cultural and political identities – to prove that the world is made for people like us.” That may be what people believe, but if so, they have a lousy definition of their own relationship with God.

The world can indeed be made for “people like us”, but that hardly implies that people like us cannot reject and destroy God’s gifts for us. Not only do we do that all the time, but in fact the entire story of the Bible — choose your Testament — is the story of people rejecting God’s gifts.

Jed’s fascinating description of the “providential” view of nature defines it largely by:

its emphasis on the world’s being made for use, and the conviction that, if we work it properly, we will be rewarded. If you believe this at the level of identity – it is part of who you are, why it makes sense for you to do the work you do, live where you live, drive what you drive, and trust as you do in the afterlife, then climate change might be a pretty serious affront. After all, it amounts to saying that how we have lived on the continent is self-undermining, even self-immolating. *The providential God doesn’t do this kind of grim historical irony.*

I have to dissent from that. Not only does God do this kind of irony, that’s just about *all* He does. The entire story of Israel is God bestowing upon it the extraordinary gift of Torah, and after which Israel then proceeds to betray Him by chasing after other gods and violating His covenant. And we readers sit there and say, “No! No! Don’t do that!” I realize the danger of [disagreeing with Jed about irony](#), but it seems to me that that is the paradigmatic case of dramatic irony (reader realizing something that the characters do not) and personal irony (human beings continually pursuing self-destructive behavior).

I’ll happily admit to being on less firm ground with regards to the New Testament, but the entire purpose of God making himself flesh was to die for men’s sins and thus redeem them. Human beings acted like human beings — but acting like human beings means doing bad things because of Original Sin.

It thus seems to me that a genuinely “providential” view of nature requires the ongoing assumption that human beings cannot simply follow their instincts, because of a lot of those instincts are bad. Christians call it Original Sin; Jews call it חטא אדם הראשון, or the “Evil

Inclination” (which is balanced by the Good Inclination).

If one is looking for irony, it is that evangelical Christians, who seem to have little trouble discussing sin when it comes to other people’s sexual habits, seem to forget all about it on the issue of care of the earth. When Richard Cizik, the executive vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, tried to persuade the evangelical movement of the importance of “creation care,” he was fired for his troubles.

Tomorrow is Thursday, when traditional Jews recite [Psalm 81](#). God warns us there not to simply follow our instincts, not to simply do what we want:

<sup>8</sup> Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—  
if you would only listen to me, Israel!

<sup>9</sup> You shall have no foreign god among you;  
you shall not worship any god other than me.

<sup>10</sup> I am the LORD your God,  
who brought you up out of Egypt.  
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

<sup>11</sup> “But my people would not listen to me;  
Israel would not submit to me.

<sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts  
to follow their own devices.

<sup>13</sup> “If my people would only listen to me,  
if Israel would only follow my ways,

<sup>14</sup> how quickly I would subdue their enemies  
and turn my hand against their foes!

<sup>15</sup> Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him,  
and their punishment would last forever.

<sup>16</sup> But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;  
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Take note: *honey* from the rock, not coal.