

**White paper for the World Christian Economic Forum 2019
July 2019 by Ben Freeth**

**Redemptive Stewardship Practices
Of cyclones, governments, justice and love**

In Zimbabwe, we have recently experienced Cyclone Idai, described as the strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded in the entire southern hemisphere by the World Meteorological Organisation. Cyclone Idai made landfall in Mozambique on March 14, 2019 as a devastating category five storm, slamming into the port city of Beira. It then raged inland across Mozambique and into the mountainous Chimanimani district of eastern Zimbabwe, causing massive destruction.

Here the cyclone dumped nearly a foot of rain each day for three days. Social media was awash with horrifying pictures of huge mud slides, destroyed villages, dead people, buried schools, washed away bridges and raging silt-ridden rivers. It was the most rain ever recorded in such a short period of time in Zimbabwe. In Mozambique, a vast inland sea formed inland of Beira that was nearly 100 miles long. Malawi to the north also sustained extensive damage and flooding.



A man searches for missing family members with his dog on March 18, 2019, in Ngangu township, Chimanimani, eastern Zimbabwe, after the area was hit by Cyclone Idai. Photo credit AFP

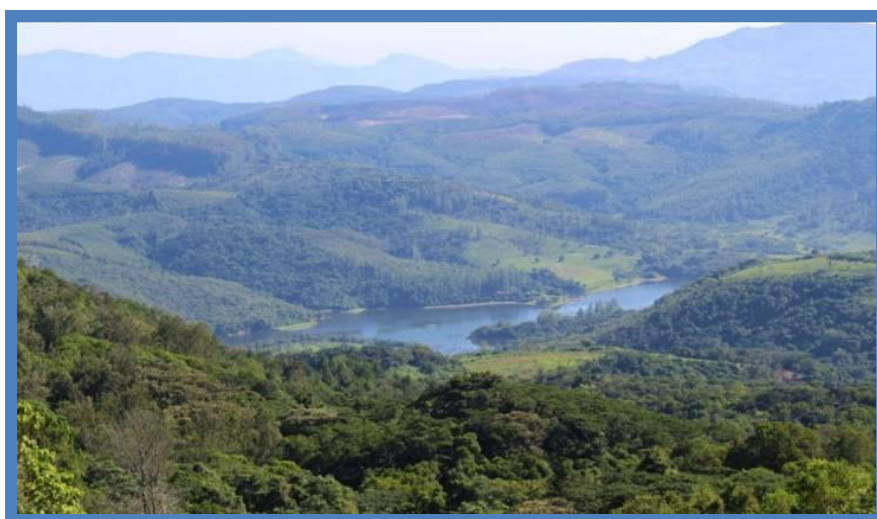


A washed away bridge in Chimanimani on March 18, 2019. Photo credit Reuters

I received a message that a landslide had gone through our little holiday cottage in the Vumba district of the eastern highlands. With a great deal of trepidation I immediately drove there during the tail end of the cyclone to see what could be salvaged. "Be careful!" I was warned.

As I got closer my stomach tightened. It was the same feeling one gets when one is going into a war zone. You don't know what to expect. Danger is all around: flooding rivers; falling rocks; landslides; falling trees... I came kitted out with a rucksack and climbing ropes ready to walk into the area, knowing it was unlikely that I would get there in a vehicle.

I negotiated a number of landslides and crossed several rivers and, as I got closer, I became more and more amazed. In a place that had averaged nearly a foot of rain a day for the previous three days, there was remarkably little damage. In fact the only damage was where man had disturbed God's designed order. The natural forests and grasslands were in fact pristine. The rivers had not even overflowed their banks; and they were not heavily laden with eroded silt as would be expected. Indeed, amazingly, they were running clear! If it were not for the landslides on the cuttings of the roads, the place looked a though it had only had a few inches of rain - along with strong wind.



Where God's designed order had been undisturbed, the scenic Vumba district remained pristine

With hubs locked and in low range 4-wheel drive, my truck managed to crawl all the way to our cottage and I was able to begin the repair work immediately. The cottage had been built by the previous owner after carving out a small platform into a hillside. The resulting man-made bank behind it had slid - and 20 feet of the back wall of the cottage had been razed to the ground, with over 30 tons of mud and rocks invading the main living area!



Work began immediately to clear the landslide at the back of the cottage

A little further south, where conventional agriculture and clear felling forestry practices had taken place, they had disturbed the soil much more and the destruction was horrifying. Entire villages had been buried with their inhabitants. Virtually an entire golf course, maintained by local volunteers, had vanished. Towns were completely cut off, with all bridges gone and the only way in by helicopter. The rivers were running in full spate, carrying millions of tons of topsoil that had eroded away.



Massive mudslides roared down disturbed slopes, caused devastation in the Chimanimani district

It was a visual, dramatic and very sobering demonstration of stewardship gone wrong. When mankind does not work with God's natural laws on the land, the land is destroyed and every living creature suffers. Stewardship of the land was the very first aspect that God gave man responsibility over in the book of Genesis. It is from the land that mankind is sustained. If we do not as stewards look after everything that lives in the correct way, we see massive destruction take place. God has built the laws of justice into every aspect of His creation. As mankind has become more and more divorced from the land, it has become increasingly difficult for him to see the laws of justice written into God's creation.

In the same way that ordinary people have worked against God's *natural* laws, so government has worked against His *given* laws. In Zimbabwe, our government has continued to violate the God-given higher laws of justice. The Ten Commandments, notably covetousness (10th Commandment), theft (8th Commandment), murder (6th Commandment) and lying (9th Commandment) have been violated to achieve greedy personal ends - and are the ways by which our government rules and controls the Zimbabwean people. As a consequence, our own man-made cyclone of destruction is wreaking its harvest of havoc.

Just as the land needs redemptive stewardship to protect it and bring it back to health and vigour, so communities and nations need redemptive stewardship in the issues of justice. On the land we have seen how extreme weather conditions can wreak very little destruction when the land is stewarded correctly and the natural order has been maintained.

In contrast to the three feet of rain in three days that we had in the east of Zimbabwe, a little to the west we have had only one foot of rain for the entire year. We are now in dire drought conditions! Despite the drought, using *Foundations for Farming* conservation agriculture methodology, we planted, grew and reaped a crop of open-pollinated maize (corn), despite all the crops around us having failed and died due to lack of rain. The people in our area reaped nothing.

Our "secret" (which we are trying to share everywhere we can!) involves the use of compost; a thick mulch layer; planting at the right time; proper weed control; the use of crop rotation and other farming practices of excellence that emulate how things work in God's creation. When we do not farm according to God's laws, God's justice dictates that His judgment will come, crops will fail and hunger will ensue.



(Left): Our conservation agriculture maize crop; (right): conventionally grown subsistence maize

Ultimately God's entire universe is built around the laws of justice and love. We read that God's very throne was founded on justice and righteousness. Justice dictates that if we love and protect the land and its trees, plants and animals - and steward them faithfully, the land will do well. When we fail in this regard, destruction will follow.

The Molotov cocktail that results from the destruction of property rights by controlling Marxist dictatorships - and the resultant raping of the land - along with extreme weather conditions - is the reason for almost all the need for aid in Africa. In Zimbabwe, we have shown that when property rights and justice systems were in place, we did not need aid.

When governments do not practice the laws of God's love and justice, their countries fail. We know that in Zimbabwe we can once again become the bread basket of Africa, as we were prior to the farm invasions and destruction of the commercial agricultural sector.

However, when soldiers, secret police, "justice" officers and government leaders collude to kill innocent citizens by shooting them in the back; beat people mercilessly; break down the doors of homes indiscriminately; abduct people continuously; rape women violently; charge pastors and other people of treason falsely; and steal private property and people's homes year in and year out, these countries will self-destruct. If the concept of stewardship is respected and the people are looked after with justice and love, those very same countries will revive and thrive.



Soldiers whip a man in the street during a brutal crackdown on 1 Aug 2018. Photo credit: Reuters

I am always amazed at the tiny state of Israel. This is a land area that is one nineteenth the size of Zimbabwe, where half the land area is true desert - with less than an inch of rain a year - and unable to be used in agricultural production. Despite this, agricultural production has grown from very little in 1948 to approximately three times the size of the current Zimbabwean agricultural industry.

Agriculture in Israel



On an agricultural tour of Israel, you see various types of agriculture, including dairy farming, desert and drip irrigation, greenhouses, aquaculture, ecological farming and green energy.



Agriculture in Zimbabwe

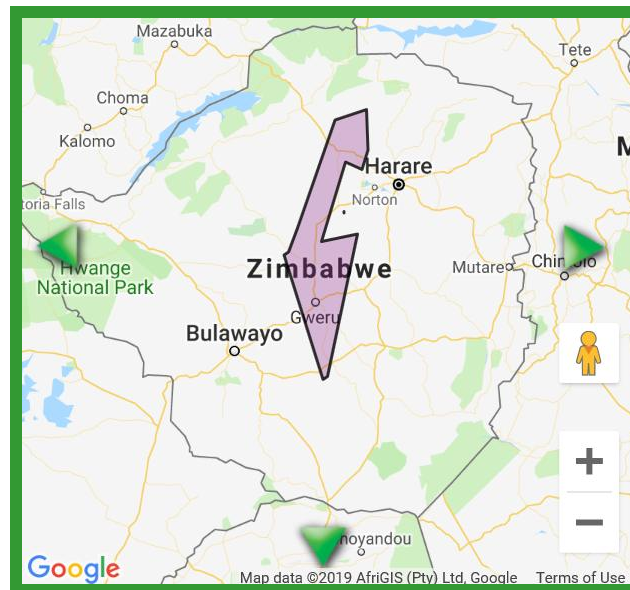


Commercial agriculture before it was decimated by the illegal farm invasions



Wanton destruction in the wake of the land grab that began in 2000 and still continues

Furthermore, if we utilised our dams, rivers and resources correctly, and farmed according to God's conservation agriculture principles, we would once again be able to feed our population and export our surplus crops. We have plenty of arable land and labour, excellent growing conditions and Lake Kariba, the largest man-made body of fresh water on the planet.



Map of Israel superimposed on the map of Zimbabwe
 Map courtesy Overlaymaps.com <http://overlapmaps.com/index.php>

When God's laws of justice and love are used redemptively, creatively and in a Godly way, as is the case in Israel, each given hectare can become more than 100 times as productive - as is the case in the agricultural GDP output comparison between Israel and Zimbabwe as it stands now: US\$3bn in Zimbabwe and US\$9bn in Israel on 40 times less land! This is the reason for the current difference between the agricultural output in Israel, despite its limitations, and Zimbabwe, despite its massive advantages.

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Agricultural tours to Israel photo reference:
http://www.israelagro.com/itineraries/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMlu8vU9-q94QIVpLXtCh3DEgGoEAAYASAAEgKK-vD_BwE#.U24V8ChXpW8

Zimbabwe is about 19 times *bigger* than Israel reference:
 Israel is approximately 20,770 sq km, while Zimbabwe is approximately 390,757 sq km. Meanwhile, the *population* of Israel is ~8.3 million people (5.5 million *more* people live in Zimbabwe). We have positioned the outline of Israel near the middle of Zimbabwe.
<https://www.mylifeelsewhere.com/country-size-comparison/zimbabwe/israel>