

The Bible and Caring for the Environment

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Genesis and humans versus animal nature

Gen 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (God thinks all of nature is very good, as opposed to Greek and some Eastern traditions which devalue the physical world and over value the 'spiritual' world).



Gen 1:28 Then God said let us make humans in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish, the birds, the livestock, and over all creatures. So God created humans in his own image, 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 over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Gen 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (our first task on Earth is to look after the planet, being caretakers/ stewards/ good managers of God's earth. God remains in ownership)

What does it mean to be made in God's Image?

Image is used in the sense of a king's ring used to seal wax on documents i.e. It has the delegated authority of the king. So we being in God's image have his delegated authority to care for / manage the earth.



Are animals "spiritual" and how do we value them? How does God value them?

Matthew 6:26 Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they (there is a ranking of "value" but what does this look like?).

Eccles 3:18-21 As for humans God tests them so they may see they are like the animals. Their fate is like that of animals, the same fate awaits them both: as one dies so does the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. All go to the same place. Who knows if the spirit of a human rises up and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth. (animals definitely have spirits)

Gen 9:4-11 God holds animals accountable for their actions (i.e. they make moral choices), but murder is more serious than death of an animal, and animals are specifically included in God's covenants.

"And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man". As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it." Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.



Ps 148: Praise the Lord sun, moon, praise him you shining stars, sea creatures, mountains hills, trees, wild animals. (Also 145:21, 150:6) (nature worships God)

God reveals Himself through nature

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that we are without excuse.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge. (Nature shares in worshipping God)



Nature is marred by the effects of sin

Gen 3:17-19 Cursed is the ground because of you (Adam), through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field.

Is 24:4 The Earth dries up and withers the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The Earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth the new wine dries up and the vine withers.

Hos 4:1-6 The Lord has a charge to bring against those who live in the land. There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery. Because of this the land mourns and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.

Jer 12:4 How long is the land to mourn and the vegetation wither for the wickedness of the dwellers in it. Animals and birds are snatched away...



Jesus died on a tree for a tree

Jesus' death on the cross was to put right that which went wrong at the fall, to restore our relationship with God but also to restore the distortions in our relationship with the Earth and with each other. Nature is included in the salvation, redemption, and reconciliation that Jesus achieved on the cross.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world (cosmos – includes nature) that he gave his only Son...

Rom 8:19-21 The creation itself waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation itself was subject to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Mark 16:15 Go into all the world and preach good news to all creation.

Col 1:19-20 For God was pleased to have his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The End Times

Many Christians have a passionate belief in the end-times, when the Anti-Christ shall rise, great tribulations shall occur, and environmental disasters will happen, such as a third of the trees being burned up, a third of the seas turning to blood, and a third of the rivers turning bitter (Rev 8:7-12). Somewhere in the midst of all this, (and just when exactly is open to great debate) Jesus shall rapture the Christians away off to heaven, to live happily ever after, while the naughty people suffer horrifically before the second coming of Jesus. The result of this very firm belief is, at best, one of ambivalence towards environmental disasters that are caused by human activity. If it's been prophesied, God has decreed it will happen, so what can we mere mortals do about it? At worst it results in a celebration of environmental destruction because it means that Jesus will return sooner (after he has checked off his 'to do' list of tribulations listed in Revelation).

God will destroy those who destroy the Earth





A big mistake when reading Revelation is to think that God expects us to be innocent bystanders while the angels and demons slug it out. Revelation is a message to engage in the struggle against the evil that is occurring, not to tune it out. Revelation 11:18 records the following: “The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great – and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Rapture is Rubbish

Actually the Rapture is completely unbiblical, Christians believe in the second coming when Jesus returns and history as we know it comes to an end and we change to a new heavens and a new earth (we're on the new earth not in some disembodied 'heaven').

2 Pet 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved what manner of persons ought you to be. Nevertheless we according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. (KJV)

The Earth is not necessarily destroyed but rather transformed, dissolved and made new like Jesus body when he died and was raised. It bore the scars of his old body but was renewed. The word 'dissolve' is similar to 'found' in the sense of melting and allowing to harden as in a foundry (i.e. purifying not destroying). For example: Malachi 3:2-3 “But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiners fire or a launderers soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver”.



Miscellaneous other verses

Ps 147:8-9 He covers the skies with clouds, he supplies the earth with rain and makes the grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and the young ravens when they call.

Col 1:16-17 All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.

Ezek 36 Prophecy to the mountains, ravines and valleys... I am concerned for you and will look on you with favour (v9).

Psalms 104:25-26 The sea is vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan (sea monster) which you formed to frolic there.

Job 41:1-5 Can you pull in the leviathan, can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls. (Implying God does treat it like a pet).

Ps 65:5, 9 You answer us with awesome deeds O god our saviour, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. You care for the land and water it, you enrich it abundantly.

Mth 25:1-3. Parable of the ten virgins – a resource management parable?

Mosaic law has lots of provisions for caring for the land

Ex 23:20-22. Fallow year for land and animals

Ex 20:8-20. Sabbath rest every week for animals too

Lev 25:1-22. The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and tenants. Jubilee year to prevent wealthy landowners from exploiting land.

Dt 20:19-20. No food trees to be cut during war.

Dt 22:6-7. Protection for mother birds.



Further resources

Titles available from Manna Bookshop

Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action by J. Matthew, M.D. Sleeth

The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action, by R. J. Berry.

Connect - Thinking biblically about Climate Change, by Richard Bull (bible studies for home groups)

The End Times Made Simple: How Could Everybody Be So Wrong about Biblical Prophecy, by Samuel E. Waldron.

Other titles

How many lightbulbs does it take to change a Christian, David Shreeve & Claire Foster.

For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care by Steven Bouma-Prediger

Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility (Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy), James A. Nash.

Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues by Calvin B. DeWitt.

Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation
by Edward R Brown.

Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship
by Tri Robinson Jason Chatraw.

God Is Green: Ecology for Christians by Ian Brodley.

Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship by David C. Mahan Joseph K. Sheldon
Raymond H. Brand.

Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope (Hardcover) by Brian McLaren.

Green Christianity by Tim Cooper.

Web pages

www.arocha.org. (look at the New Zealand link)

National Association of Evangelicals webpage <http://revision.org/content.asp?contentid=482> or visit www.revision.org and click the "Protecting Creation" link at the top of the page.

baptistcreationcare.org - Southern Baptists leaders (representing 16 million of the most conservative Evangelicals on the planet) have signed a declaration in March 2008 saying they need to care for God's creation, and that not to is like ripping pages out of the Bible (because God reveals himself through creation).