

## What Does The Bible Say About Creation Care?

My quest began by asking "Is Creation Care a Biblical value?" which led to asking: "Just what is Creation Care?" The answer according to *The Evangelical Environmental Network* is:

*"Creation-care means caring for all of God's creation by stopping and preventing activities that are harmful (e.g. air and water pollution, species extinction), and participating in activities that further Christ's reconciliation of all of creation to God. Doing creation-care fills us with the joy that only comes from doing the will of God."*

"Caring for all of God's creation" certainly seemed like a Biblical value to me. However, I wanted to know exactly "What does Scripture say about God's people and their role in caring for His creation?" In the Old Testament I tried to look at the creation story with fresh eyes. When I moved from the Patriarchal age to the Mosaic age I examined Israelite laws and customs about land tenure and animal care looking for clues as to the role God had for His people in His creation. I then examined the New Testament Scriptures looking for clues as to how identifying as followers of Jesus informs our relationship to God's creation.

I concluded that there are three axiomatic solid Biblical principles which apply to every age and culture:

1. *The earth, its produce, and its inhabitants belong to God, not to humanity.*
2. *Humanity's God appointed role in the creation is that of steward.*
3. *God takes great pleasure in His creation and expects His people to respect and protect it.*

This seems to me to be as pertinent today as it was in the Patriarchal and Mosaic eras. If my conclusions and assumptions are correct then a critical question to answer is "How does our identity as Christians, the redeemed people of God, impact our care of God's creation?" I believe the answer can only accurately be arrived at by comparing what the Bible says about Creation Care to our attitudes toward conservation and our actions toward the environment.

But I have gotten ahead of myself. To determine what the Bible says about creation care I decided to break down my Biblical investigation by the three covenantal ages of Judeo/Christian history: the patriarchal, mosaic, and church.

### Patriarchal Era

In **Job 38 & 39** Job receives a tough series of questions from God. The intent of this interrogation is to remind him that he is creature not Creator.

*"Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, or caused the dawn to know its place? ... Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or have you walked in the recesses of the deep? ... Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,*

*stretching his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up, and makes his nest on high?" Job 38:12, 16; 39:26-27*

When I read these questions, I echo Job's response, surely not I. I can hardly understand these mysteries let alone mimic or duplicate them. Only the God of all creation can do such things. Rather, all of these astounding aspects of creation fill me with worship. Whether standing at the ocean's edge, feeling the spray on our face or standing on a mountaintop, feeling the wind in our hair or observing wild creatures in their habitat or watching a majestic hawk float through the air, our hearts cry out with the psalmist:

*"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth; You who has displayed Your splendor above the heavens!" Psalm 8:1*

This is as it should be. However, Scripture teaches that God expects those who worship Him as Lord to be diligent stewards of His creation. The term Creation Care is merely a new term for expressing a thoroughly Biblical concept.

Let us go back to our original question: "Is Creation Care a Biblical value?" In the **first chapter of Genesis** God reveals His plan for His creation. Here the interdependence of the cosmos takes shape within the literary framework of a perfect week. At the end of the week, on the seventh day, God rests, satisfied with His creation. His "rest" communicates not only His complete satisfaction with what He has created, but also that in His sovereignty as the Creator he has provided for its maintenance. I want to draw our attention to what He does on the final day of Creation: on the sixth day God appoints a steward. A steward who is under the Creator but over His creation:

*"Then God said, 'Let Us make humanity in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule ...' Gen 1:26*

God's ideal design created by His sovereign will He places into the hands of those whom He has created in His own image. Humanity has the privilege and responsibility of facilitating His ideal design as His stewards. This was God's perfect plan. The role of the human stewards within the created order is clearly expressed in **Gen 2:15**:

*"Then The Lord God took the human and put him into the garden of Eden to tend it and guard it."*

Regardless of how narrowly or widely we interpret the Genesis account of creation the message of these accounts is clear: the garden belongs to God, but Adam (literally, man) was given the privilege to rule and the responsibility to care for this garden under the sovereignty of the Creator. God's ideal is clear - a world in which humanity would succeed in constructing civilization by directing and harnessing the abundant resources of the garden under the wise direction of their Creator. Here there would always be enough, progress would not necessitate pollution, and expansion would not demand extinction. The privilege of the strong would not necessitate the deprivation of the weak.

The family of Adam (humanity) would succeed in these goals because of the guiding wisdom of God. Then comes the story of the fall of humanity; Adam rejected this perfect plan and chose autonomy instead. Because of the authority of his God-given position as steward of the entire creation, Adam's (literally man) choice cast the entire cosmos into disarray. As the Apostle Paul wrote, because of Adam, even

"The creation was subjected to futility" Rom 8:20.

Today we readily recognize the results of choosing autonomy over God's sovereignty in the arena of human relationships: poverty, greed, violence, etc. Moreover, we recognize and embrace our role as Christians to stand in opposition to those societal ills. However, rarely, it seems, do we even consider the impact of choosing autonomy over God's guidance on creation. Even more rarely, it seems, do we consider our role as Christians to stand in opposition to those environmental ills brought on by our rebellion.

### **Mosaic Era**

Israel stands as the first model of God's relationship with a redeemed people. Israel is reminded repeatedly that the good land they are about to receive is a gift. Although God invites them to live upon the land with joy and productivity, it will never truly be theirs. As in the garden, God owns the land; it is humanity's privilege to live upon it. Not only does God retain the right to reclaim His land, He makes it very clear that He will distribute the land as He chooses. As a result, He does not allow the citizens of Israel to abuse each other or the land by means of the self-serving acquisition and sale of real estate ([Lev 25:13-17](#); [23](#); [Isa 5:8](#)). Even the produce of the land belongs to God. As is reiterated throughout the laws of the first fruits, the tithe, and the gleaning laws, it is His expectation that the Israelites will not exhaust the produce of the land in their quest for economic success ([Deut. 14:22-28](#); [18:1-5](#); [Ex 23:19](#); [Lev 19:9-10](#)). Rather God commands that Israel reserve a portion of the produce of the land for the marginalized among them.

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap the corners of your field; the remnant of the harvest you will not gather. But you will leave what remains for the needy and the immigrant. I am the Lord your God." ([Lev. 23:22](#))

Moreover, God commands a Sabbath for the land itself so that it might be able to replenish itself.

"But during the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath rest, a Sabbath belonging to The Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest's after growth you shall not reap, and the grapes of your untrimmed vines you shall not gather ... Rather the Sabbath (growth) of the land shall be your food: belonging to you, your male servant, your female servant, your hired man, your temporary resident, and the immigrants among you. Even your beast and the wild animal that is in your land shall have all its crops to eat." [Lev. 25:4-7](#)

Levitical teaching that it is not acceptable to take from the land everything you can

stands in sharp contrast to the consumer culture in which we live. Rather, God commands His people to leave enough so that the land is able to replenish itself for future harvests and future generations - even though such methods would significantly cut into the farmer's short-term, agricultural profits. Why?

**"Because I am the Lord, says The Lord."**

In other words, because this is God's land and God's produce which God intends to be fruitful for the next generation of tenants. Moreover, it is apparent that God wants a portion of His harvest distributed to the voiceless among His people: the slave, the refugee, even to the domestic animal, and the wild creature. In sum, these Israelite laws communicate that economic growth is not a viable excuse for the abuse of the land, the abuse of the poor, or the abuse of wild creatures! wonder what those stripping Canada of its forests for paper production at a current rate of five acres a minute to produce the 17 billion catalogs produced annually in the USA (according to the [Audubon Society](#)) might say about God's law of conservation? What about those creating lunar landscapes in Eastern Kentucky by means of "mountain top removal" (MTR) coal mining, a form of coal mining that requires the targeted site clear-cut and then leveled by the use of explosives in order to reach the minerals desired. Demolition may extend as far as 1,000 feet below the surface. The "overburden" (the vegetation, topsoil, rock, etc.) ends up dumped into surrounding valleys (according to [Wikipedia](#)). Due to the need to dump the "overburden," the U.S. EPA estimates that mountaintop removal has buried over 700 miles of healthy streams and damaged thousands more. The environmental results of this method are literally devastating. Water tables under the mountain are eliminated, surrounding ground water is frequently poisoned by the coal slurry byproduct, and the potential for the re-growth of forests or any type of plant life larger than grasses is rendered improbable (according to the [EPA](#)). The rationale for MTR is money. MTR is lucrative for coal companies because the utilization of explosives and large machinery significantly reduces the need for workers (according to the web site "[Appalachian Voices](#)"). This mining method is having a devastating effect upon the lives, income, property, and health of the poor in Appalachia who have no choice but to live with the impact of this shameful practice (according to [www.appvoices.org](#)). What would the factory "farmers" who have achieved near-constant production made possible only by the intensive application of pesticides and caustic chemical fertilizers say about God's law to Israel? I wonder what God might have to say to those who are growing rich from these endeavors? Even in the midst of the crisis of warfare, God commanded His people to treat His creation with care.

**"When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; you may eat from them but you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man that it should be besieged by you?" Deut 20:19**

For ancient Israel, even national security was not a viable excuse for the abuse of the earth or the magnificent flora God has designed to reside upon it. Scripture is not silent regarding how the creatures that inhabit this planet with us are to be treated. Perhaps

the account of the great flood contains the most visible message: Although God judges the world because of its corruption, He rescues animal kind along with humankind. He also makes His new covenant with

"Every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth" Gen 9:10-11.

God deems that all creation is worthy of God's deliverance and His ongoing covenant. In the elegant poetry of **Psalm 104** and the Whirlwind speeches of the **Book of Job**, we hear the poetic celebration of the beauty and dignity of the wild animal and its habitat.

"He is the one who sends forth the springs into the wadis; between the mountains they flow; giving drink to each of His wild creatures." ps. 104:10

"Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth? Have you watched the calving of the deer? ... Who sent out the wild donkey free? Who loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, to whom I gave the wilderness for a home, and the salt land for His dwelling place?" Job 39:1, 5-6

These passages demonstrate that even in a fallen world, God rejoices in the beauty and balance of His creation. Moreover, God has designed the created order so that His wild creatures will have the food, water, and habitat that they need to survive and prosper, It is God who

"Sent out the wild donkey free" and "gave to him the wilderness for a home"  
Job 39:5-6

It is by His understanding that the hawk soars

"Stretching out his wings toward the south,'- and it is by His command that the eagle nests in the high country" Job 39:26-27

The single greatest cause of the extinction of animal species is the reckless destruction of their habitat - and we in America are presently devouring nearly 2 million acres a year for the noble quest of urban sprawl - the fact that God designed the wild animals' habitat and gave it to them should give us pause. In Israel's era, God promulgates laws that protect both the domestic creatures who serve Israel, and the wild creatures who inhabit the Promised Land with Israel. An Israelite

"Shall not muzzle the ox while he drags the threshing sledge for his master"  
Deut 25:4

In other words, we should allow an animal who serves us the opportunity to enjoy its life and work, even if it cuts into our profits a bit. How would this Biblical principle reflect on the billions of animals who currently serve us in America's factory farms? Animals who spend their lives stacked one atop the next in row upon row of tiny wire cages,

immersed in their own feces, confined in windowless warehouses, never seeing the light of day. Poultry who are force-fed food to the point that their internal organs fail, who are sustained in such crowded and filthy conditions that any semblance of a natural life is stripped from them, and enormous doses of antibiotics are necessary to control infection. Is this what God intended for the creatures He entrusted to humanity? Consider the complex Levitical legal structures that accompanied the slaughtering of animals, Israel was certainly allowed to slaughter and eat the animals they raised, but any domestic animal had to be taken before the priest first. According to Leviticus 17, this practice was to serve in part as a sign that the animal's life has been considered. In Israel, the life of the animal was valuable; it was wrong to take it without thought, or without mercy. Reflect upon these laws in comparison with the assembly line approach we employ in the raising, slaughtering, and mass marketing of animal flesh in America. I was horrified to read in Matthew Sculley's book *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* that current practice is such that the animals we eat are slaughtered in such massive numbers that the slaughterhouses cannot even ensure that they are dead before dismemberment begins. Do we ever consider the life of the animals whose flesh we buy at our local supermarket every week? Israel was constrained to do so, by Levitical law. As for the wild animals, Levitical law commands:

**"If you happen upon a bird's nest in front of you in the road, or in a tree, or upon the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting upon the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother (who is sitting) upon the young. Rather, you will shoo the mother away, and the young you may take for yourself, in order that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days."**  
**Deut 22:6-7**

Thus Israel is instructed that if they killed off the wild creatures without a thought as to the creatures' ability to replenish their populations, it would not "be well" with Israel in the land. Doesn't it make sense that the same warning is true for us? All of these laws of land, tree, and animal communicate a similar theme: the land, its produce, and its inhabitants belong to God, not humanity. God takes pleasure in His creation. He has designed it, provided for it, and He expects His people to respect and protect it. If I were to summarize the message of the Old Testament regarding creation care into a single principle, it would be this: The earth is the Lord's and all it contains; we may make use of it to meet our need, but we may not abuse it in our greed.

## **Christian Era**

Principles of land tenure and animal care are not as visible in the New Testament as they are in the Old due in part to the urban audience of the New Testament, and in part to its focus on the more central objective - revealing the character of the new Adam. The New Testament focuses on explaining how Christians are to live in this present world as **"citizens of another kingdom."** However, the message of creation continues to reverberate in this new context:

**"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and**

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created by Him and for Him" Col 1:16

Rather than the New Testament changing the Old Testament message of creation, it reinforces it. Moreover, the ultimate miracle of the New Testament is that Christ will ultimately liberate all of the cosmos. As Paul elaborates in **Romans 8**, it is not only humanity who anxiously awaits "the revealing of the sons of God," but all of creation as well.

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."  
Rom 8: 19-21

Why does creation anxiously long for the revealing of the sons of God? Because at the second coming creation will at last be freed from the chaos of humanity's rebellion, it too will be healed from the effects of sin. John offers us a glimpse of the master plan in **Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two**. Here heaven is actually "a new heaven and a new earth" where the cosmic river is free to flow, and the tree of life has multiplied so much that it lines the street of the city (**Rev 21:1; 22:1-2**). In other words, "heaven" is not only Eden-restored, "heaven" is this very earth, healed of its scars and washed clean of its diseases. The Apostle Paul in **Romans 8** speaking of the believer's bodily resurrection (the ultimate expression of our identity as a redeemed child of God) in concert with the resurrection of the creation speaks volumes regarding the intrinsic value that God places upon this planet and its creatures. God's did not give us His creation merely for our consumption, but to tend and protect it as His stewards. Considering this Biblical testimony, where should Christians position themselves regarding creation-care? Of all the voices and all the "facts" that are presently calling for our allegiance in the arena of philosophical, theological, and political ecological and environmental thought, there is one voice I believe every Christian wants to hear - that of Scripture. That is why I began my study of creation care with a survey of the Bible.

One Biblical principle seems incontrovertible to me namely that the creation and its creatures are not ours they are His. At the dawn of creation, Adam was appointed to care for creation, specifically to tend it and to defend it (**Gen 2:15**). Our fallen race has instead chosen to use its superior gifts to exploit it and to abuse it. In our greed, we have taken what we wanted with no concern (often no thought) as to what the consequences of our behavior might be upon God's good creation.

The statistics are staggering countless waterways poisoned, thousands of species lost, millions of acres decimated, unfathomable quantities of trash. God created humanity in His image and commanded us to serve and to protect His creation, yet humanity has instead ravaged His creation. Just as the results of humanity's choice in the arena of human relationships are clear to see, in the arena of our relationship with creation, the results are all around us. However, God calls His people to be different. In this fallen world, the role of the Christian community is to live our lives as an expression of another

Kingdom, to reorient our values to those of God. The role of the Christian community is to live our lives as Adam and Eve should have, as Jesus has. Our calling is to demonstrate with our lives

**"What the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect"  
Rom 12:2**

What is the will of God regarding creation?

**"Then The Lord God took the human and put him into the Garden of Eden to  
tend it and to protect it." Gen 2:15**

The Biblical message is clear: it is our responsibility as redeemed humanity to live in such a way that the intentional stewardship of God's creation is evident in our lives. We cannot avoid this responsibility. The Biblical mandate of Creation Care is that we reverence the earth as God's creation and use its resources rightly in the service of others and to the honor and glory of our Heavenly Father, the creator of heaven and earth.

What does the Bible say about Creation Care? Is it a Biblical value? The answer is obvious even from this brief survey of Scripture: Creation Care is Scripturally mandated. It is not an option. To tend and protect God's creation is our responsibility as God's appointed stewards of His creation.