

# What The Bible Says About the Environment

In the first chapter of Genesis, God instructs humanity “to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Two Psalms (Psalms 8 and 115) reinforce the notion that God gave the Earth to man.

It is regretful that our conquest of the Earth has not been more positive. God gave us the sacred and challenging responsibility to serve as caretakers of our world. In addition to the animals, we are equally the custodians of the oceans, the mountains, rain forests, the prairies, and even the atmosphere. God granted to us, in a way, the ability to act as God. The planet Earth is ours to govern.

Yet, having dominion over something does not mean to foolishly use it or abuse it.

Since the 1990s, the amount of food harvested from the ocean has been in decline, as we fish the ocean to depletion. In addition, we use the ocean as both a food pantry and dump. We produce toxic chemicals, nuclear waste, crude oil, and other garbage – often with little concern for their safe disposal. Inevitably, much of it reaches the ocean. In addition, as we continue to pump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the oceans absorb some of it. This has resulted in ocean acidification, threatening coral reefs and all ocean life. A giant “island of garbage” floats atop the Pacific Ocean, while trash routinely washes ashore on islands around the world.

The birds of the air are also under assault. The passenger pigeon and the dodo bird are just two of many species of birds that went extinct due to human activity. The California condor and the bald eagle teetered on the brink of extinction before human intervention saved them. Bird colonies around the world are at risk of extinction, as man encroaches on their breeding and feeding habitats such as wetlands, forests, lakes, and rivers. Air pollution and chemicals also threaten the bird population.

Animals hold a special place in the Bible. It is true that they were considered property, yet, God made it clear they were to be treated compassionately. In Proverbs, we are told that the righteous care for their animals, and we are mandated to care for them and know their condition.

In Exodus and Deuteronomy, we are instructed to care for stray animals, and return such animals to the owner. We must also allow a beast of burden the ability to eat while working, and to give the

animals one day of rest in seven.

While some pets are treated humanely, other animals do not fair as well. Many are hunted and killed for sport rather than necessity, as we senselessly slaughter entire species of animals to the brink of extinction. Tigers, leopards, rhinos, elephants, and even some of the great apes may be gone in the years ahead. Animal fighting is a cruel but popular sport around the world. Spectators cheer as animals are pitted against each other, often fighting to a bloody death.

In Leviticus, God instructs us to give the land one year of rest in seven with neither planting nor harvesting. Even during war, when trees were cut to provide siege material and weapons, the Bible commands the people to spare fruit-bearing trees.

Yet, we rape the land for its mineral wealth, and slash, burn, and clear forests for agriculture, roads, housing, and businesses.

If we consider the tremendous amount of damage that we unleash upon the animals, the air, the ocean, and the land, it is clear that we have acted brashly and foolishly. All of this must change if we are to fulfill the sacred obligation entrusted to us by God, and care for our world.

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