

Question: Some of my Christian friends seem to discount concern for environmental ecology. Does God not care about the environment?

An absence of concern for environmental ecology reflects a lack of knowledge of the word of God contained in the Bible. Without getting involved with the politics of environmental issues, let me simply say that as our creator God expects his people to be careful stewards of the physical world in which we live. He has given numerous instructions to his people about the care of this world that he has entrusted to us.

Beginning with the creation story, we are told that when God created the first humans he gave them responsibility to rule over all forms of life on earth (Genesis 1:28-29). The next chapter further explains: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). These statements imply a kind of stewardship that would rule out careless destruction of the earth.

Later, God regretted that he had created man. So, he decided to cleanse the earth in a flood and to begin again. To accomplish his purpose, he saved not only Noah and his family on the ark but also two of every kind of animal on the earth. Humanity and the environment were renewed and maintained. After the flood, God said to Noah and his sons: “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” (Genesis 9:9-11). God gave the rainbow as the sign of that covenant.

When God had Moses lead his people, Israel, out of Egyptian slavery and into the Promised Land, he gave them laws that would protect the land and help it remain productive. They were to have a Sabbath day of rest for themselves every seven days. In addition, every seven years the land, the vineyards and the olive groves were to remain unplowed and unused (Exodus 23:10-11). The livestock and wild animals were allowed to benefit from the Sabbath year (Leviticus 25:7). Laws against overuse of the land would have functioned to rejuvenate and preserve it. Wise farmers continue to follow these principles today.

Furthermore, God’s laws to Israel on war prohibited them from the unnecessary cutting of trees,

especially fruit and nut trees (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). They were also told: “If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

However, God’s concern for the environment centers in his greater concern for human beings created in his own image. The creation story indicates that the environment was created to provide for the existence of humanity (Genesis 1:27-31). At the end of each day of creation, God said it was good; but at the end of the sixth day when he had created the man, God said it was very good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25 & 31). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:26). Humanity’s greater place in creation does not mean we have a right to carelessly misuse our environment. But we do need to keep things in perspective. Above all else, remember that God loves us and wants to have an eternal relationship with us if we will allow him. He has demonstrated his love by providing for our well-being in this world.

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