

“The Creator Loves This Place: God’s Care for His Creation and Our Responsibility”

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Seventh-day Adventists have referred in our name to two critical events in which we believe, both involving the entire planet: one that has happened, and one that will happen in the future. We have expressed our understanding of these two events in our fundamental beliefs—doctrines that we believe are especially crucial for this world in its last days.

God’s Love for His Creation and the Animals

Yet, sometimes, it seems the far-reaching parameters and implications of these two doctrines escape us. For example, we believe that the seventh-day Sabbath established by the great Creator during the first week of this world underscores that He is the God of both time *and* space. And this *is* a vital issue! Yet many Adventists seem to overlook the Creator’s heart and how much He loves what His own hands have made. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture reminds us that the Creator has never lessened His concern about this world, no matter how much humans have abused it. Here are a few examples of His caring attention:

1. On the fifth day of the creation week the Creator blessed the newly created birds and sea creatures. The text reads, “God spoke to *them* saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Gen 1:22).¹ With no humans around yet, to whom was He speaking! These are the same instructions He gave to humans and land animals the next day, whereupon He pronounced *everything* “very good”!

2. In Noah’s ark, animals were saved along with humans—in fact, many *more* animals than humans. Then, after the Flood, the divine covenant given to Noah specifically included animals, repeating several times:

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you *and* with your descendants after you, *and* with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. . . .” And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, *and* every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth (Gen 9:8–13, emphasis supplied).

The Creator does not hesitate to include animals within His covenant!

3. The Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue includes both humans and animals in its blessing. Further divine Sabbath counsel in Exodus elaborates on this: “on the seventh day you shall rest, that *your ox* and *your donkey* may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed” (Exod 23:12, emphasis supplied). The blessed time of rest is granted to all humans and animals. Even the land itself was given a seventh-year “sabbatical” (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:1–7).

4. After Balaam beat his donkey three times, God released her tongue (Num 22:28) and she cried out, asking Balaam why he had been beating her, reminding him that she had faithfully served him for a long time. She

obviously already had intelligence. The text merely states that God “loosed her tongue” and she cried out to Balaam in a language he couldn’t avoid.

5. Note the psalmist’s testimony: “Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast” (Ps 36:6). This was already demonstrated in the Flood narrative where the same word for salvation is used of both humans and animals. The modern mindset has subtly degraded the value of animals. Bible writers, on the other hand, emphasize how the Creator treasures all life!

6. When people try to imagine heaven, ideas are often restricted to golden streets and harps. But when God describes His future restoration of a perfect world, He includes the animals:

The *wolf* also shall dwell with the *lamb*, The *leopard* shall lie down with the *young goat*, The *calf* and the *young lion* and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them.

The *cow* and the *bear* shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the *lion* shall eat straw like the *ox*. The nursing child shall play by the *cobra*’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the *viper*’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And *His resting place shall be glorious.*” (Isa 11:6–10, emphasis supplied).

7. Scripture climaxes with a great chorus singing praise to the Creator. Note all the different voices in that choir: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing! *And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them*, I heard saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Rev 5:11–13, emphasis supplied).

This great worship scene reflects the same perspective already found in the Old Testament. Notice the voices in the great praise chorus of Psalm 148 (emphasis supplied):

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! ... all His angels ... all His hosts ... sun and moon ... all you *stars* of light ... Praise the Lord from the earth, You *great sea creatures* and all the depths; Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; Mountains and all hills; Fruitful trees and all cedars; *Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and flying fowl*; Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; Both young men and maidens; old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven.

The familiar Christian doxology—“Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below . . .”—captures this grand biblical theme. But few people, when singing these words, realize the implication of all the different voices of praise. We may be slow in understanding this, but the communication of

animals is now being widely studied and reported.² Much praise is wending to the Creator that we are apparently not aware of!

We must not let the evolutionary mindset of modern thinking overshadow the grand truth of Scripture that God loves this world and all the creatures He made. Moreover, animals are not dumb. Ellen G. White noted this a century ago:

The *intelligence* displayed by many animals approaches so closely to human intelligence that it is a mystery. The animals see and hear and love and fear and suffer. They use their organs far more faithfully than many human beings use theirs. They manifest sympathy and tenderness toward their companions in suffering. Many animals show an affection for those who have charge of them, far superior to the affection shown by some of the human race. They form attachments for man which are not broken without great suffering to them. . . . What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher's knife? How could he devour their flesh as a sweet morsel?³

Strikingly, White wrote on the cruelty involved in eating meat long before the dreadfully cruel modern practice of “confined animal feeding operations.” And as my nutrition teacher in university said, after describing some of these practices, “If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention.”

At least two issues come to mind: (1) Belief in a caring Creator suggests that our concern should include all living creatures and even a special stewardship for the land God gave to human beings. After all, God even gave the land a “sabbatical” every seven years. (2) Intelligent and sensitive care for all life includes refraining from eating the dead flesh of animals, realizing that the vegetarian diet itself is meant to be a blessing.

The Heart of the Matter

Why are Adventists not known for stewardship of the earth? We call attention to the Creator and His created world in our very name, yet are slow to realize and proclaim the importance of beneficial creation care practices. We reduce and limit stewardship to tithing (as important as tithing is). And why are Adventists not part of the burgeoning contemporary movement to eliminate meats from the diet—for health reasons *and* for concern over God's creatures?

Informing and improving these attitudes could bring real blessings to others as well as ourselves. It would do us well to recall that God has always called His people to be a blessing to the world. Even Abraham was told, “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and *you shall be a blessing . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen 12:2–3, emphasis supplied).

Adventists have also been called to be a blessing by sharing the good news of the gospel. Yet this gospel is sometimes twisted to be a system of works that we need to do in order to attain perfection so that Jesus can come. Even the counsels of White are used as a hammer by some while others simply ignore her. But when it comes to the violence-free, plant-based diet she recommends, rather than being thought of as an advanced blessing God wishes His human family to have, too many still say, “I don't have to be a vegetarian to be saved.”

But that is not the point! God gave us health counsels through Ellen White so that we could be blessed and share this blessing to a dying world. And since the three angels' messages are a deep theological truth with complex

implications that take careful thinking to understand, clearing one's mind by eliminating harmful foods enhances the reception of this blessing. As Ellen White instructs regarding ancient Israel:

The Lord plainly told His people that *every blessing* would come to them if they would keep His commandments, and be a peculiar people. He warned them through Moses in the wilderness, specifying that health would be the reward of obedience. The state of the mind has largely to do with the health of the body, and especially with the health of the digestive organs. As a general thing, the Lord did not provide His people with flesh meat in the desert, because He knew that the use of this diet would create disease and insubordination. In order to modify the disposition, and bring the higher powers of the mind into active exercise, He removed from them the flesh of dead animals. He gave them angels' food, manna from heaven.⁴

And pointedly, note how the Lord started the miracle manna meals before He presented the Decalogue on Mount Sinai.

In recent years more and more studies have been published about the horrifying cruelty occurring in modern animal husbandry—and the resulting harm and diseases it causes in both animals and humans. Long before these modern trends, Ellen White noted the cruelty to animals in the context of flesh foods. She emphasizes the issue by reminding us of the close connection between physical and spiritual health:

The moral evils of a flesh diet are not less marked than are the physical ills. Flesh food is injurious to health, and whatever affects the body has a corresponding effect on the mind and the soul. Think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God!⁵

And elsewhere she states:

The liability to take disease is increased tenfold by meat eating. The intellectual, the moral, and the physical powers are depreciated by the habitual use of flesh meats. Meat eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities. . . . Your safest course is to let meat alone.⁶

There are major national conferences and even cruises on vegetarianism, featuring prominent health educators, but Seventh-day Adventist lecturers are hardly ever included. Yet we have had in our tradition a long history of knowing the benefits and blessings of a violence-free, plant-based diet. Have we hidden our light “under a bushel” and deprived people of this great blessing God intended to give through us? While we have produced several studies on the benefits of a healthful lifestyle we could have been developing more scientific studies for the last one hundred years to undergird Ellen White's advanced counsels—ideas that are only now being discovered in modern science. We could have been what God yearns His followers to be: “the light of the world” (Matt 5:14). He wants His people—whether in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or presently—to be a light and blessing amid the confusing ideas of this dying world:

And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them (Deut 28:13, emphasis supplied).

However, through the years Ellen White’s advanced counsels have often been ignored, taught as a way to obtain salvation, or considered outdated. What might have happened if Adventist scientists and educators had taken Ellen White’s materials seriously and studied them rather than dismissing or ignoring them—for truth can stand the closest investigation⁷—and found ways to scientifically present them as an advanced blessing?

Our name can’t help but draw attention to the created world, both through the seventh-day Sabbath blessing and because God has promised to come again to renew His beloved world and destroy the damage sin has caused. Therefore, we return to the question:

Why have we have been so slow in proclaiming the blessings of a violence-free, plant-based diet first given in Eden to both humans and animals (Gen 1:29–31)? That diet will be restored when Jesus returns: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; *there shall be no more death*, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be *no more pain*, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4, emphasis supplied). And why is it that we have been so slow to be good stewards of this earth, having restricted our understanding of stewardship often to money? Since we believe in the literal creation of our world, why haven’t we been known for our joyous care of it? Jesus’ own example should inspire us, for He even notices when a sparrow falls (Luke 12:6). He also admires the lilies His hands have designed and created: “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Luke 12:27).

Just because Adventists believe in the literal second coming of Jesus doesn’t mean that we should be careless of or harmful to this world. Jesus wasn’t. Although He knew one day this world would be cleansed and made new, He didn’t just leave it as it was when He lived on earth: He healed the sick, raised the dead (though He knew they would die again before His second coming), and revealed a caring attitude toward animals.⁸ This is how Ellen White describes Jesus:

Jesus was the fountain of healing mercy for the world; and through all those secluded years at Nazareth, His life flowed out in currents of sympathy and tenderness. The aged, the sorrowing, and the sin-burdened, the children at play in their innocent joy, the little creatures of the groves, the patient beasts of burden,— all were happier for His presence. He whose word of power upheld the worlds would stoop to relieve a wounded bird. There was nothing beneath His notice, nothing to which He disdained to minister. Thus as He grew in wisdom and stature, Jesus increased in favor with God and man. He drew the sympathy of all hearts by showing Himself capable of sympathizing with all. The atmosphere of hope and courage that surrounded Him made Him a blessing in every home.⁹

Elsewhere she says,

Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father’s notice. Satan’s hatred against God leads him to delight in destroying even the dumb creatures. It is only through God’s protecting care that the birds are preserved to gladden us with their songs of joy. But He does not forget even the sparrows.¹⁰

Having an inclusive, compassionate attitude is not to impress God with our good deeds. What should motivate us is the desire to be a blessing to this dark world—being the “light on the hill” that God spoke of.

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¹ All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), unless otherwise indicated.

² For example, Monty Roberts, *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (New York: Ballentine, 2009); Candace Savage, *Encounters with the Wise Guys of the Avian World* (Vancouver: Graystone, 2015).

³ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 315–316.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 375 (emphasis supplied).

⁵ White, *Ministry of Healing*, 315.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:63–64.

⁷ “The subjects which we present to the world must be to us a living reality. It is important that in defending the doctrines which we consider fundamental articles of faith, we should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound. These may avail to silence an opposer, but they do not honor the truth.

We should present sound arguments, that will not only silence our opponents, but will bear the closest and most searching scrutiny” (Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 299).

“The parables of Jesus were designed to arouse a spirit of inquiry which would result in a clearer exposition of the truth. As he was thus instructing his disciples in the meaning of his words, the people again gathered about to listen, and his teachings were received and cherished in the minds of many who heard them. These discourses of Jesus were not merely to a class of inferior minds; but there were intelligent and cultivated persons present who were capable of the closest criticism. Scribes, Pharisees, doctors, rulers, lawyers, and the representatives of all nations, were there to hear; yet there were none to gainsay his words in all that vast assembly” (Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* [Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870], 2:241–42).

⁸ “The passionate belaboring of animals or the disposition to show he is master is often exhibited toward God’s creatures in the streets. This is venting their own anger or impatience upon helpless objects which show they are superior to their masters. They bear all without retaliation. Children, be kind to dumb animals. Never cause them pain unnecessarily. Educate yourselves to habits of kindness. Then it will become habitual. I will send you a clipping from a paper and you can decide if some dumb beasts are not superior to some men who have allowed themselves to become brutish by their cruel course of action to dumb animals”. (Letter 26, 1868, 2–3 [To Edson and Willie White, Dec. 16, 1868] in 3MR, 49.1).

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 74.

¹⁰ White, *Testimonies*, 8:272.