

Creation Care



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 1:25; 2 Peter 3:10–14; Genesis 2:15; Nehemiah 13:16–19; Hebrews 1:3; Psalm 100; Genesis 1:26–28.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden. He put him there to work its ground and to take care of it” (Genesis 2:15, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: How should Christians deal with the environment?

WHAT SHOULD WE, AS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, THINK ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT? We know that this earth is polluted, will continue to be polluted, and will one day be destroyed, burned up in a great lake of fire. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them” (2 Peter 3:10, NIV). In addition to this truth is the Bible command, “ ‘Let them [humans] rule over the fish in the waters and the birds of the air. Let them rule over the livestock [animals] and over the whole earth. Let them rule over all of the creatures [living things] that move along the ground’ ” (Genesis 1:26, NIV). So, it is no wonder that, at times, we have struggled with the fact that we are polluting the very places where these fish, birds, livestock, and animals live.

As stewards (managers) of all God’s gifts, we have a responsibility to take care of the earth. After all, God created it and announced that it was “very good.” As a people with a special message about God as Creator (Revelation 14:6, 7), we should have something important to say about the question of how we deal with God’s creation.

This week we will study what the Bible says about some of these issues.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 19**THE “SAVE-THE-LOBSTERS”
MOVEMENT! (2 Peter 3:10–14)**

Years ago, an environmentalist¹ entered a seafood restaurant. There before him in a large tank were six Maine lobsters that probably would die before the restaurant closed that evening. Customers would pick the ones out that they wanted to eat. Before long each lobster would be sitting on someone’s plate next to a potato covered with cheese.

Moving silently with a bag, the environmentalist reached into the tank, grabbed the first lobster he could get his hands on, threw it into the bag, and ran. He then put the lobster in a tank in his car and drove to the shore. There, a helicopter took him over the ocean, and he returned the lobster to the water.

Another time, an American actress dedicated an entire show of her TV program to stealing lobsters from restaurants and letting them go free in the ocean.

These two are not alone in how they feel. You can visit a Web site titled “Lobster Liberation [Rescue]” that talks about saving lobsters from being eaten by humans. It even has a part called “Tips [Ideas] for Releasing Lobsters,” telling you what to do after you rescue (save) lobsters from the restaurant.

Caring about the environment is one thing. But stealing a lobster out of a restaurant and taking it by helicopter

back to the ocean does seem to be overdoing it.

All of which leads to the question: how should Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventist Christians, care for the environment? After all, Jesus is coming soon. And our whole message is based on the idea that this world is coming to an end. And we know that this earth is so polluted that it is not going to last forever. So, then, how concerned should we really feel about the earth itself?

Read 2 Peter 3:10–14; Isaiah 51:6; Isaiah 65:17; and Revelation 21:1. What does the Bible clearly teach in these verses about the final fate of the earth? How should this teaching influence the way we feel about the environment? Or should it at all?

The Bible is very clear. This world, this earth, will not last. It will be destroyed by God, who promises to make it over, to re-create it, to make a “new heaven and a new earth.” There is no excuse (as we will learn this week) to abuse the environment. But we should be careful not to make a god out of the earth and of the environment. We might laugh at the people who overdo it. But we need to be careful not to get caught up in doing too much ourselves.

What important message should we take from Romans 1:25 about how we show our care for God’s creation?

1. environmentalist—a person who believes in protecting our environment (land, natural resources).

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 20**A STATEMENT ON CREATION CARE (Hebrews 1:3)**

What do Seventh-day Adventists think about the question of the environment? How do we get involved and still keep a right balance? Below is an official statement, voted on by the church leadership back in 1995.

“Seventh-day Adventists believe that humans were created in the image of God. So, they represent God as His stewards [managers] who take care of the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way.

“Unfortunately, dishonest politics and greed have been brought on by poor human managers. More and more, men and women have been involved in the destruction of the earth’s resources. This results in widespread suffering, environmental problems, and negative climate changes. While scientific research needs to continue, destructive gases, vanishing ozone,² disappearing American forests, and the greenhouse effect³ are all threatening the earth’s ecosystem.⁴

“These problems are largely due to human selfishness and greed for more and more ‘good things’ in life through the destruction of natural resources. The crisis is caused by man’s refusal to practice good, wise, and faithful management of God’s creation.

“Seventh-day Adventists support a

simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people avoid abusing and wasting natural resources. We call for the wise use of the world’s resources and respect for created life.”—Adapted from Adventist Administrative Committee (ADCOM), released at General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29–July 8, 1995.

How do Genesis 1:1, 26; Genesis 9:7; Psalm 24:1; Psalm 100; James 5:1, 2, 4, 5; and Hebrews 1:3 help us to understand the reasoning behind the church’s statement?

As Christians who believe that this world and the good things in it are gifts from God, we should be leaders in taking care of them. If you believed that the earth just happened by chance, you could almost be excused for trying to use it for your own profit. But we understand this world as something that God created and supports. So, we need to be responsible managers of it.



Disappearing forests are threatening the earth’s ecosystem.

2. ozone—a layer around the earth protecting it from harmful sun rays.

3. greenhouse effect—pollutants of all kinds that cause the earth to become too warm, upsetting the proper balance of life on it.

4. ecosystem—the balance of systems such as water and air to support life on earth.

How might your own selfishness influence the way that you treat the environment? And what is wrong with the attitude (feeling) that says, “Well, I am only one person, so why does it matter what I do?”

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 21

CREATION CARE (Matthew 22:37–40)

Taking care of the environment is not openly discussed in the Bible. But there are a lot of issues (problems) that the Bible does not discuss openly. What the Bible does do, and does again and again, is give us principles (important rules) that should be used in all areas of life. This includes the environment.

In what ways could the principles of Matthew 22:37–40 influence our attitude (feeling) toward the environment? (This is especially true when the wrong use of the environment can have some very harmful results on others.)

Early on in the Bible, we are given an example of humanity’s (people’s) duty to be stewards (managers) of what God had given Adam on the earth.

Genesis 2:15, NIV, reads, “The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden. He put him there to work its ground and to take care of it.” In what way does this show how people were meant to care for the earth?

Notice the relationship here. God created this beautiful environment for man. It was given to him as a gift. But notice what Adam was supposed to do to it. He was to work it and to keep it. The word translated as “keep” comes from the Hebrew root *smr*, which means “to watch [care for],” “to preserve,” or “to protect.” So, right from the start, even in the pre-Fall world, Adam was called to be a steward of the environment in the Garden of Eden. God did not tell him to abuse it, to use it for his own selfish gain, or to get out of it all that he could. Instead, God told Adam to work it and protect it.

What reason could we have for believing that this principle has changed? If this is what Adam was called to do in a world before sin, how much more important would good stewardship (management) of the world be after the damage caused by sin?



If Adam was called to take care of the earth before the Fall, how much more should we care for that same world after the damage caused by sin?

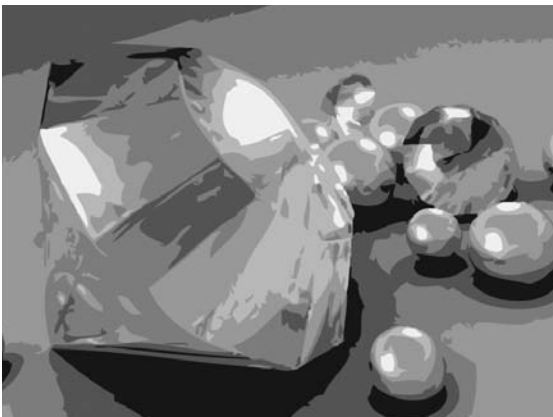
How careful are you about the environment around you? How much do you really even care about it? How important or unimportant is it to you? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 22

SABBATH AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Proverbs 27:20)

“Death and the Grave are never satisfied. A man’s eyes are never satisfied either” (Proverbs 27:20, NIV). How does the truth of this verse directly influence the whole question of creation care and the danger our abuse causes to the environment?

As the creation statement from the church leadership (Monday’s lesson study) says, part of the reason for the problems in our environment today has to do with “human selfishness and greed.” In other



No matter how much some people get, it is never enough.

words, people just want more and more, and the only place they can get it is from the earth. Using natural resources is not the problem. Instead, the problem is that no matter how much certain people get, it is never enough. When was the last time that you ever heard someone, no matter how wealthy, say that he or she had enough money?

In the midst of all this, we still have God’s gift of the Sabbath.

Read these Sabbath verses: Exodus 20:8–11 and Nehemiah 13:16–19. We probably think about them in different ways. But think about how Sabbath keeping helps us to care for creation by commanding us to rest from our work and from trying to make money and do business. In this way, how can Sabbath keeping influence the environment for the good?

Sure, the Sabbath is about remembering that God created the world. This should make us remember how we should treat it. By keeping the Sabbath, we have a powerful weekly reminder that life is not all about making money and that we are not to do the kind of work that can damage the earth.

How has Sabbath keeping helped you to overcome the greed and desire for more? How often has money tempted you (caused you to want to sin) to break the Sabbath?



The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that life is not all about making money.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 23

OUR CONTROL OF THE WORLD (Genesis 1:26, 28)

In Genesis 1:26, 28, we have some of the Bible’s earliest instructions on how people are to act toward the created world. Read these verses over prayerfully and carefully. Think about how they relate to creation care and the environment. Then answer the following questions:

1. **How complete was our control over the earth meant to be?**
2. **What does it mean to work and to have control over the earth and all that is in it? Why is there nothing in these texts that gives us permission to abuse and pollute that creation?**
3. **Genesis 1:28 says that humans are to “replenish [fill] the earth.” The Hebrew word here for “replenish” means to “fill the earth.” How could this meaning help us to understand the way that the earth should be treated?**

There is no question that humans were meant to rule over the earth under the power and direction of the Lord. We also need to remember that these verses were given in the pre-Fall world. This was a world without sin, death, and suffering. So, these verses should teach that whatever “control” over the world means, it does not mean a terrible abuse of the world. This is because those things certainly would not have happened in a world before sin. Whatever control meant, it did not mean destroying that world.

Of course, a lot has changed since then: the Fall, the Flood, the curse (Genesis 3:17–19), and the general downfall (ruin) caused by sin as a whole. But a person would have a hard time finding anything in these verses that would allow the abuse and ruin of the planet itself. If anything, we learn from these verses about our responsibility, as rulers of the world, to take care of the world because God created it. And God said that it was “very good.”

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “In the beginning, God was shown in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens. He laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and made the flowers of the field. ‘You formed [created] the mountains by your power.’ ‘The ocean is his [Christ’s] because he made it’ (Psalm 65:6; Psalm 95:5, NIV). It was Jesus that filled the

earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father's love.

"Now sin has spoiled God's perfect work. But His handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory [beauty and praise] of His power. There is nothing, except the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. There is no bird that flies through the air, no animal moving upon the ground, that has not helped some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, that has not failed to give support to other life. Every tree and shrub and leaf gives life without which neither man nor animal could live. And man and animal, in turn, give support to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers give sweet smell and show their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun gives its light to make a thousand worlds glad. The ocean, itself, gives all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists [fog] come up from the ground and fall in showers to water the earth, that flowers may come forth and bloom." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 20, 21.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday's final questions.
- ② How would you answer the person who says, "Jesus is coming soon, so why should I care about the environment?"
- ③ How can we as Christians keep the right balance in understanding the need to care for the environment but, at the same time, not overdoing it? Why is it so important that we do not get caught up with very political environmental groups?
- ④ If you have the tools, do some research on how a vegetarian diet can be better for the environment than a meat-eating diet. Discuss your findings with the rest of the class.

SUMMARY: There is no question that this world is coming to an end. It will not last forever. And, yes, Jesus is coming soon. All that is true, but nothing in these truths gives us the right to abuse the earth. If anything, as Christians, we should try to take care of the world that our God has created for us.