

Creation Care



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 3:10–14, Rom. 1:25, Psalm 100, Heb. 1:3, Gen. 2:15, Neh. 13:16–19, Gen. 1:26–28.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (*Genesis 2:15*).

Key Thought: How should Christians relate to the environment?

What should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, think about the environment, especially because we know that this earth is corrupted, will continue to be corrupted, and will one day be destroyed, burned up in a great lake of fire: “and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (*2 Pet. 3:10*)? Add to this the biblical injunction about humans having “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (*Gen. 1:26*), and it’s no wonder that, at times, we struggle with how to relate to environmental concerns.

At the same time, as stewards of all God’s gifts, don’t we have an obligation to take care of the earth? After all, didn’t God create it and pronounce it “very good”? As a people with a distinct message about God as Creator (*Rev. 14:6, 7*), shouldn’t we have something to say about the question of how we treat God’s creation?

This week we’ll explore what the Bible says about some of these concerns.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 25.*

The Lobster Liberation Movement!

Years ago an environmentalist entered a seafood restaurant. There before him, sitting in a large tank, were half a dozen Maine lobsters that probably wouldn't last the night. A customer would pick out the one that he or she wanted to eat, and before long the lobster would be sitting on someone's plate next to, perhaps, a potato smothered in cheese.

Moving stealthily, the environmentalist reached into the tank, grabbed the first lobster he could get his hands on, threw it into a 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 then returned the lobster to the water. A lobster liberator strikes again!

The man was not alone in his concern. You can visit a Web site titled "Lobster Liberation" that talks about saving lobsters from getting eaten by humans. It even has a section called "Tips for Releasing Lobsters," telling you what to do once you rescue lobsters from a restaurant.

Another time, an American actress dedicated an entire episode of her sitcom to smuggling lobsters out of restaurants and releasing them in the ocean.

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 a bit extreme, does it not?

All of which leads to the question, what about Christians—indeed, Seventh-day Adventist Christians—and the environment? Putting aside the strangeness of the lobster liberators, how should we relate to environmental concerns? After all, isn't Jesus coming soon? Isn't our whole message predicated on the notion that this world is coming to an end, that this earth is corrupted and not going to last? Given our understanding of the Second Coming, how concerned need we really be about the earth itself?

Read 2 Peter 3:10–14, Isaiah 51:6, 65:17, and Revelation 21:1. What does the Bible clearly teach about the ultimate fate of the earth? How should this teaching impact the way we look at the environment? Or should it at all?

The Bible is more than unequivocal: this world, this earth, will not last. It is destined to be destroyed by God, who promises to make it over, to re-create it, to make a "new heaven and a new earth." Although that's hardly an excuse (as we'll see this week) to abuse or exploit the environment, it should at the same time help to protect us from making a god, as many have done, out of the earth and of the environment. While we can laugh at the extremists, we need to be careful not to get caught up in those extremes ourselves.

Read Romans 1:25. What important message should we take in regard to how we show our concern and care for the creation?

A Statement on Creation Care

How, then, do Seventh-day Adventists view the question of the environment? How do we get involved and yet seek to keep a right balance? Below is an official statement, voted by the church leadership back in 1995.

“Seventh-day Adventists believe that humankind was created in the image of God, thus representing God as His stewards, to rule the natural environment in a faithful and fruitful way.

“Unfortunately, corruption and exploitation have been brought into the management of the human domain of responsibility. Increasingly men and women have been involved in a megalomaniacal destruction of the earth’s resources, resulting in widespread suffering, environmental disarray, and the threat of climate change. While scientific research needs to continue, it is clear from the accumulated evidence that the increasing emission of destructive gasses, the depletion of the protective mantle of ozone, the massive destruction of the American forests, and the so-called greenhouse effect, are all threatening the earth’s ecosystem.

“These problems are largely due to human selfishness and the egocentric pursuit of getting more and more through ever-increasing production, unlimited consumption and depletion of nonrenewable resources. The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind’s greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship within the divine boundaries of creation.

“Seventh-day Adventists advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism, goods-getting, and production of waste. We call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world’s resources, reevaluation of one’s needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.”—Adventist Administrative Committee (ADCOM), released at General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29–July 8, 1995.

Look up the following texts. How do they help us to understand the reasoning behind this church statement? *Gen. 1:1, 26; 9:7; Pss. 24:1; 100; James 5:1, 2, 4, 5; Heb. 1:3.*

If anything, as Christians who believe that this world and the life and resources on it are gifts from God, we should be at the forefront of seeking to take care of it. If we believed that the earth is just a chance creation, the product of cold, uncaring forces, we could almost be excused in seeking to exploit it to our own ends. When, though, we understand this world as something that God created and sustains, it’s hard to see how we could do anything other than be responsible stewards of it.

How might your own selfishness impact how you treat the environment? And what’s wrong with the attitude that says, “Well, I’m only one person, so what does it matter?”

Creation Care

The issue of the environment, and caring for the environment, isn't specifically and openly addressed in the Bible. Of course, there are a lot of specific issues that the Bible doesn't address. What the Bible does do again and again, is give us principles that should be applied to all areas of life, which include the question of the environment.

Think about Matthew 22:37–40. In what ways could the principles taught here impact our attitude toward environmental concerns, especially when misuse of the environment can have some very detrimental effects on others?

Early on in the Bible, we are given some indication of humanity's call to be a steward of what God had given Adam on the earth. Although the context is very specific, it's hard to see why the principle shouldn't continue.

Genesis 2:15 reads, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” How does this reveal the way in which humankind was originally intended to relate to the earth?

Notice the reciprocal relationship here. God created this beautiful environment for the man; it was given to him as a gift. And yet, see how Adam was supposed to relate 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” or “to preserve” or “to protect.” Thus, right from the start, even in the pre-Fall world, Adam was called to be a steward of the environment in which he was placed. God didn't tell him to exploit it, to use it for his own selfish means, and to get out of it all that he could. Instead, he is told to work it and protect it.

What reason could we have for believing that this principle has changed? In fact, if this is what Adam was called to do in a world before sin entered, how much more important would good stewardship of the world be after it has been damaged by sin?

How conscious are you of environmental concerns? How much do you really even care about them? How important or unimportant are they to you? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Sabbath and the Environment

“Hell and Destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20, NKJV). How does the truth of this text directly impact the whole question of creation care and the danger our exploits pose to the environment?

As the creation statement said, part of the reason for the issue with our environment today has to do with “human selfishness and the egocentric pursuit of getting more and more through ever-increasing production, unlimited consumption and depletion of nonrenewable resources.” In other words, people just want more and more, and the only place they can get it is, ultimately, from the earth. Using natural resources, though, isn’t the problem; instead, the problem is that no matter how much a person gets, it’s never enough. When was the last time you heard someone, no matter how wealthy, say that they had enough money?

In the midst of all this, God has given humanity the gift of the Sabbath.

Look up these Sabbath texts. Although we tend to think about them in other contexts, try thinking about them in the context of how Sabbath keeping, by commanding us to rest from our work, to rest from seeking to make money and do business, could in a very real way impact the environment for good.

Exod. 20:8–11 _____

Neh. 13:16–19 _____

Sure, the Sabbath is about remembering that God created the world (which itself should make us conscious about how we treat it), but it is also about resting from the pursuit of making money. By keeping the Sabbath, by purposely taking one seventh of our lives every week and, without exception, not pursuing wealth and money and goods, we not only have a powerful weekly reminder that life isn’t all about making money, but we also often refrain from the kind of pursuits that, when overdone, do damage to the earth.

How has Sabbath keeping been a means of helping to restrain your own greed and desire for more? How often has the lure of money tempted you to violate the Sabbath?

Humankind's Dominion

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. . . . And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (*Gen. 1:26–28*).

In the above verses we have some of the Bible’s earliest references to the way in which humanity is to relate to the created world. Read them over prayerfully and carefully, thinking about them in the context of creation care and environmental concerns, and then answer the following questions:

- How complete was humanity’s control over the earth to be?
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- What does it mean to subdue, and to have dominion over, the earth and all that was in it? What, if anything in the texts, gives humanity the license to abuse and defile that creation?
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- Genesis 1:28 says that they are to “replenish the earth.” The literal Hebrew means to “fill the earth.” How might that be understood in regard to the question of how the earth should be treated?
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No question, humanity was to rule over the earth, at least under the power and direction of the Lord. The fact that these verses were given in the pre-Fall world, a world without sin and death and suffering, should teach us that whatever dominion over the world means, it doesn’t mean a violent exploitation and plundering of the world, for those things certainly would not have happened in a world before sin. Whatever subduing and dominion entailed, it didn’t entail destroying that world.

Of course, a lot has changed since then: the Fall, the Flood, the curse (*Gen. 3:17–19*), and the general degeneration caused by sin as a whole. Yet, one would be hard pressed to see in these texts anything that justifies the plunder and ruin of the planet itself. If anything, we can see in these texts humankind’s responsibility, as ruler of the world, to take care of it, because God created it, and it was “very good.”

Further Study: “In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and fashioned the flowers of the field. ‘His strength setteth fast the mountains.’ ‘The sea is His, and He made it.’ Ps. 65:6; 95:5. It was He 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 marred God’s perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun sheds its light to gladden a thousand worlds. The ocean, itself the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 20, 21.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final questions.
- 2 How would you respond to the person who says, “Jesus is coming soon, so why should I care about the environment”?
- 3 How can we as Christians strike the right balance in our understanding of the need to be concerned about the environment while at the same time not getting caught up in some of the extremist movements involved in environmental issues? Why is it so important that we don’t get caught up in them, especially those that are very political?
- 4 If you have the resources, do some research on just how beneficial a vegetarian diet is to the environment in contrast to a meat-eating one. Discuss your findings with the rest of the class.

Summary: No question, this world is coming to an end; it will not last forever. And yes, Jesus is coming soon. All that’s true, but nothing in these truths gives us the right, or the mandate, to defile the earth. If anything, as Christians, we should seek to take care of the world that our God has created for us.

The Obstinate Professor

by JONY ERNESTO

Jony Ernesto lives in Angola, a country in southwestern Africa. He is studying to become a teacher. He attends a government university where classes are held Monday through Saturday. Jony and the other Seventh-day Adventist students at the school simply skip classes that are scheduled on Sabbaths. And when their exams are scheduled for Sabbaths, they ask permission to take the exams on another day. Because there are many Seventh-day Adventist students in Angola, most teachers allowed students Sabbath privileges.

Jony's math teacher had two Seventh-day Adventists in his class, but he refused to reschedule an exam planned for Sabbath. "Whoever misses this class will receive a zero exam grade," the teacher threatened. When Jony and the other Seventh-day Adventist student pleaded for him to reconsider, the teacher told them, "Other students take their tests on Saturday, and I expect you to do so too. God likes you to have a good education. Skip church and take the test."

Jony and his friend quietly left the teacher's office. The boys knew that they would fail the test, but they weren't ready to give up yet. They agreed to pray about the exam and for the teacher some more. Jony went home to pray and study. The next day a student leader found Jony and told him, "I've been looking for you for an hour! The math teacher wants to talk with you in his office—right away." Jony found his Seventh-day Adventist friend, and together the two hurried to the math teacher's office. They knocked gently at the teacher's door and entered when invited. They found their professor pacing the floor.

The teacher returned to his desk and invited the two students to sit down. "I couldn't sleep last night," he began. "And it was because of you two. I thought about you two and your Sabbath. I realize that your faith in God is true and strong and powerful. Now I don't want any problems with your God, so I will let you take your math exam on Friday."

Jony and his friend smiled broadly and thanked their teacher. They promised to present themselves at the appointed time on Friday. After taking their exam, they again thanked their teacher for allowing them to take the test early. On Sabbath when their classmates were taking the exam, Jony and his friend stood in church to tell the congregation what God had done for them in softening the heart of their once-obstinate teacher.

Our mission offerings help further the work in Angola, where almost 350,000 Adventists share their faith.

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