

enemies shall come upon them,¹⁹⁸ and the "fruit" of this ground, along with their cattle and other flocks, would be destroyed by pestilence, fiery heat, drought, and mildew. More ominously, "the heavens over your head shall be brass, and the earth under you shall be iron. YHWH will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come upon you until you are destroyed" (Deut 28:23–24). Then, instead of having other animals as food,¹⁹⁹ the Israelites' bodies will "be food for all birds of the air, and for beasts of the earth" (Deut 28:26).²⁰⁰ Writing during the time of the exile, the author of these verses knew that Israelite tenure on the promised land had come to an end.²⁰¹ Like the land, its abundant yields were God's to give, but also, God's to take away.

3. Applied Genetics

Lev 19:19 provides that Israelites (or Judahites) were not to sow their fields "with two kinds of seed." This law may have been intended either to preserve preferred genetic strains or to facilitate harvesting by growing only one crop at a time in the same field, or both. The text does not advocate monoculture, but refers only to a landowner's or farmer's particular field during a given planting season. Under this law farmers could sow one field with one kind of seed, and the next field with another, or possibly practice crop rotation.

4. Responding to God and to Those in Need

Just as the land was God's, so also were its products. Regularly, biblical tradition views the fertility of orchards and fields as God's gift to God's people. In God's sovereignty over creation, God could give or withhold these gifts. Israelites were to acknowledge God as the giver of life by offering some of these products back to God. The major agricultural festivals ordained in the RD (Exod 34:22–24), the CC (Exod 23:14–17), H (Lev 23:1–44), and the revised Deuteronomistic Code (Deut 16:1–17), were occasions for thanksgiving and celebration before the God who had provided the people with the land's abundant produce. These festivals, sometimes characterized by later interpreters as "the cultic calendar," included the "feast of unleavened bread" (later known as Passover),²⁰² the "feast of first fruits" (also known as the "feast of weeks" or Pentecost), and the end of harvest season's "feast of ingathering" or "feast of booths."²⁰³ Several biblical laws, including some relating to periodic festivals, were grounded upon God's compassion and concern for those unable to supply their own needs. God was to be acknowledged as the giver of the earth's abundance, and such gifts were to be shared with persons in need. Theocentric reverence for life, of course, included concern for human welfare.

a. Offerings to God

Deut 26:1–11. Once the Israelites were established in the promised land they were to take some of the "first fruits" or first pickings of their initial harvest, put them in a basket, take them to "the place," give it to "the priest," and take part in the recitation set out in Deut 26:5–10b, which reads, "And behold, now I bring the first fruit of the ground, which Thou, O YHWH, hast given me." Again, the underlying assumption, is that the land belongs to God. Thus the first fruits are to be offered to God in recognition that it is God who causes the land to bring forth fruit.²⁰⁴

b. Provisions for Those in Need

Both D and H include laws providing a "safety net" or welfare for the poor—typically widows, orphans, sojourners, or resident aliens who lacked the means to provide for themselves. Such persons were entitled to "glean" in the fields and orchards following the first harvests. The story of Ruth exemplifies this arrangement.²⁰⁵ The poor were also entitled to continuing support under the third-year tithing law, and to sharing in the two annual harvest feasts.

Deut 24:19–22: Gleaning Privileges: The Sojourner, the Fatherless. This law states that landowners are not to go back after forgotten sheaves, nor to glean grapes after the first picking, nor to pick fruit from their olive trees a second time. The text does not explicitly name "the poor" as beneficiaries of these provisions; instead, it refers to the "the fatherless" (orphans), widows, and sojourners. This law and its counterparts in H accord with the understanding that the land and all that it provides are ultimately God's, and that God wants it to be used for God's own purposes—which here focus on the needs of those otherwise unable to support themselves. Implicit also, perhaps, is concern that the gifts of the land should not be wasted.

Lev 19:9–11; 23:22: Leaving Part of the Harvest for the Poor. These laws applied to the conduct of land owners and also, implicitly, to that of their families and their servants or hired hands. Reapers were not to harvest grain fields all the way to the edges or borders; and they were not to go back a second time to pick or cut what they had missed or left to ripen the first time around. Likewise, grape-pickers

were to leave some grapes on the vines, and were not to pick up grapes that had fallen to the ground. The leftover grain and grapes were for the poor and sojourners, those who did not own land or were otherwise unable to support themselves.²⁰⁶ Lev 23:22 presents another version of the "gleaning" law limiting landowners' harvesting rights and providing for the needs of the poor and the sojourner.²⁰⁷ This provision follows a series of laws governing celebration of the feast of weeks (Lev 23:15–21), but in its terms, appears to apply to all harvests. Though not mentioned, it may have been assumed that wildlife would also benefit from such laws.²⁰⁸

Deut 14:22–29; 26:12–15: The Third-Year Tithe. Deut 14:22–27 required Israelites to tithe, that is, to set aside one-tenth of their harvests each year. They were to eat this offering before God at "the place" every year. If the way to this place was too long, they were permitted to turn the tithe into money, to take the money to "the place," and to buy food there to "eat before YHWH," and to share it with the local Levites.²⁰⁹ Deut 14:28–29, however, mandates that every third year the harvest tithe be kept at the local towns and shared not only with the local Levite, but also with the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. These food bank arrangements evidently were intended to provide for such persons' needs throughout each three-year period.

The stipulated prayer or oath, which was to be uttered "before YHWH" (Deut 26:13), consists partly of a profession that one has properly kept the third-year harvest tithing law by giving the tithe to the poor, and partly of a petition to God to "look down . . . from heaven" and continue to bless Israel and "the ground" which God had given them (Deut 26:13–15). Here, once more, the ground is characterized as "a land flowing with milk and honey." From the context, it would seem that this prayer was to be addressed to God in each town, rather than at the one "place." Both the third-year tithe and the accompanying prescribed oath or prayer recognize God as the One who gives both the land and its produce.

Deut 16:9–17: The Annual Cycle of Festivals and Offerings. The "cultic calendar" laws in Deuteronomy 16 require that property owners include not only their own families and servants, but also Levites,²¹⁰ sojourners (aliens), orphans ("the fatherless"), and widows when they "rejoiced in," or celebrated, both the feast of weeks (Deut 16:11) and the feast of booths (Deut 16:13–14). In biblical times there were no food stamps, aid to families with dependent children, or other social welfare provisions. Property owners were not the only ones entitled to benefit from the gifts of the land given to them by God.

Part IX The New Covenant with All Creation

Many biblical writers, particularly the prophets, looked toward a time in the future when God would act on behalf of God's people, or on behalf of all humankind, to establish God's beneficent rule over all creation. Two texts anticipate that in this future era, God would remove or banish wild beasts from the restored land of Judah,²¹¹ perhaps relocating them elsewhere. Nowhere is anything said that would sanction destroying or exterminating any species. As in the P creation story, the ark narrative, the P covenant in Genesis 9, and throughout biblical tradition, all kinds of creatures are understood to have been made by God and are therefore are worthy of existing. Some of the prophets expressly declared that other creatures would be present in the coming or messianic age. The messiah himself was expected to come riding an ass or an ass's colt (Zech 9:9; Gen 49:10–11). The prophet Hosea anticipated that at the beginning of the messianic age, God would make a new covenant with Israel that would include other creatures as well.

A. Hos 2:18–19: A New Covenant with All Creatures

Hosea chapter 2 begins with a series of threats and warnings of judgment against Israel for her faithlessness. Beginning with verse 14, the prophet declares that God intends to redeem Israel, and in verse 18, that God will make a new covenant with Israel. This covenant, like God's covenant with humans "and every living creature" after the flood (Gen 9:10–12, 15–17), would be all-inclusive: "And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety."²¹²

In effect, this covenant establishes the conditions particularized in Isaiah's promise that in the coming messianic age, wolves, lambs, leopards, little goats, cattle, children, cows, bears, and poisonous snakes would live together in peace.

Then the earth would be "full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:6–9). In Hosea's vision of the messianic age, this new covenant apparently marks the end of all destructive behavior (hunting, killing, and hurting) between humans and animals, and among various kinds of animals. Even the "creeping things of the ground"—the smallest of creatures—would be included in this new covenant.²¹³ In effect, the originally harmonious relations between human beings and other creatures that once existed in the Garden of Eden would be restored.²¹⁴ Under this new covenant, in this new age, the curses that once "infected the ground"²¹⁵ would be removed, and the earth would again bring forth its abundance (Hos 2:21–23).²¹⁶ Other biblical visions of the future make clear what may be implicitly stated in Hos 2:18–23, that the abundant vegetation and harvests in this restored creation would benefit humans as well as other creatures.²¹⁷

B. Isa 11:6–9: The Classic "Peaceable Kingdom" Text

Here the prophet Isaiah offers a vignette of the peaceable conditions God would enact in the messianic age—that time in the future when God would make things right on earth.²¹⁸ These verses follow an explicitly messianic text, that is, one that looks for God to establish a descendant of David as the righteous king who would accomplish God's purposes (Isa 11:1–5). Isa 11:6–9 anticipates that all creation would then, once again, live together in peace.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatting together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall feed;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put his hand
on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of YHWH
as the waters cover the sea.

The promise and hope that all creation would experience this future time of salvation also comes to expression in Second Isaiah: "And the glory of YHWH shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa 40:5).²¹⁹ Somewhat more narrowly, Ezek 47:9 prophesied that "every living creature that swarms"²²⁰ would flourish by the new river that would flow from the temple in the messianic age.

According to the P creation story, God originally intended humans and all other creatures to live peaceably together. At first, humans were to have "dominion" over other creatures, but both humans and animals were vegetarians (Gen 1:26–31). Humans were to eat of "any plant yielding seed" and "every tree with seed in its fruit" (Gen 1:29) while other creatures were to have "every green plant for food" (Gen 1:30). After the flood, humans began to take other creatures for food, and, presumably (though it is not explicitly stated), some other creatures became predators, preying upon others (Gen 9:2–3). Isa 11:6–9 looks for the restoration of that original era of peace and harmony; other creatures, at any rate, would no longer kill or eat each other.²²¹ Implicitly, it seems that humans would no longer kill other creatures for food. In Isa 11:9, "they" seems to refer to all living creatures, including humans: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea."²²²

The prospect that infants and children would be safe from once poisonous snakes (Isa 11:8),²²³ may implicitly revoke the "curse" put upon relations between humans and serpents in Gen 3:15. It may be that the odd text about people picking up serpents in Mark 16:17–18 reflects some early Christians' belief that the messianic age had already commenced. Paul, on the other hand, evidently did not think that the time of enmity between people and poisonous snakes was over.²²⁴ A later disciple of Isaiah's, writing late in the sixth century BCE, likewise looked for "the peaceable kingdom."

C. Isa 65:17–25: New Heavens, New Earth, and the Peaceable Kingdom

This later Isaianic prophet, sometimes designated "Third Isaiah," writing soon after the exile, anticipated that in, or at the beginning of the new or messianic age, God would "create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:17). Evidently the prophet

expected some kind of radical transformation of the conditions of life on earth.²²⁵ Jerusalem would still be there (Isa 65:19a), but there would be no more weeping or cries of distress, no more infant mortality, and the human life span would increase to at least a hundred years (Isa 65:19b–20). People would build houses, plant vineyards, and enjoy them. There would be no calamities (sudden terror). God would hear and answer their desires or prayers even before the people called upon God. Moreover, in words echoing Isa 11:6–9, Third Isaiah assured his hearers or readers that God's creation would be at peace:

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
and dust shall be the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain, says YHWH.²²⁶

In effect, all living beings would return to the vegetarianism of primordial times indicated in Gen 1:29–30.

Conclusions

How contemporary individuals or "schools" view the authority and relevance of biblical tradition, is another question.²²⁷ Some regard biblical tradition as scripture in a strong sense, as holy writ which provides direct answers to contemporary issues, while others consider the Bible a record of what serious religious people in earlier times believed, which may sometimes illuminate latter-day Jewish, Christian, or secular understanding and moral reflection. However interpreted, biblical law and covenant witness to the belief that God's care extends not only to human beings, but also to the well-being of all kinds of living creatures.

Discussions regarding religion and ecology have moved well beyond the stage of responding to criticisms of biblical tradition for subsequent and current patterns of environmental exploitation and degradation.²²⁸ In the last few years, a great many excellent studies have examined biblical texts to see what resources and warrants they may provide for developing religiously grounded environmental ethics and related ethics of concern for all life-forms.²²⁹ These studies make it clear that contemporary concerns for the well-being of the earth (biosphere), humans, other species of living beings, and individual creatures of all species who share this planet's various habitats, need not be grounded on some kind of nature-mysticism or neo-paganism, as some proponents and opponents of such concerns sometimes contend.²³⁰ Rather, such concerns may be seen to derive directly from the kind of theocentric or monotheistic belief in God as creator and valuer of all that is.²³¹

It is obvious that biblical laws and covenants do not set out a systematic program of environmental protection. Like most contemporary environmentalists who tend to consider human well-being of primary importance, most biblical laws and covenants relate, in the first instance, to human beings, especially Israelites, Judahites, and Jews. Yet biblical laws and covenants also include other life-forms in the realm of valued beings. In its very first chapter, biblical tradition asserts that the God who made all that exists saw and affirmed that these were all "good," indeed, "very good" (Gen 1:1–31). Notwithstanding the pervasive violence that had corrupted the earth, the biblical narrative tells that, even though God was determined to "make an end of all flesh," God made provisions for preserving earthly life by instructing Noah to build a vessel and fill it with pairs of every kind of breathing creature. After the flood, humans and air-breathing creatures were ordered to "be fruitful and multiply." It was at that point that God made a covenant with humans, animals, and the earth itself. It was an "everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" that extended to "all future generations." Thus God affirms and sustains not only human history, but also "natural history," a history that includes the lives and experiences of all kinds of creatures in this world so long as the earth shall continue.

Many biblical laws accord with the understanding that God creates, covenants with, and cares for all creation. Unlike some of their neighbors and ancestors, Israelites were not obliged to sacrifice their firstborn sons or daughters. A domestic animal might be sacrificed instead—implying that in some way the animal's life was the equivalent of the human life. When either wild or domestic animals were killed for food, their blood, understood as the locus of life, was not to be destroyed by human consumption but was to be returned to the ground, whence their life had come, and thus returned to God. A number of biblical laws are specifically concerned with the well-being of animals. Some reflect special appreciation for relationships between animal mothers and their young. Some

spell out duties to assist distressed animals. One is evidently intended to promote wildlife conservation while another is intended to avoid unnecessary cruelty to animals. Several provide that animals, like humans, should enjoy periods of rest, and that wildlife should periodically be allowed to enjoy the fruits of human agriculture. Still other laws show positive interest in observing distinctions among various species and in appreciating or preserving various genetic strands of species.

A number of laws address caring for the land. That is, they view the land as having been given into Israel's possession with the understanding that God could take back that gift if Israel failed to comply with God's laws and covenants. Several laws address the treatment of trees, while others set out duties regarding utilization of harvests so as both to honor God and to care for persons in need.

The original Genesis covenant between God and "every living creature of all flesh" expressly attests to God's concern for the well-being of both humans and other living things throughout the course of history. The new covenant, anticipated and promised by Hosea and Isaiah, looked toward God's continuing care for humans and all other living beings in a future messianic age that was to be lived out on a transformed earth. Together, these two covenants embrace all time, both historical and messianic. Thus, in both covenants and for all time, it was understood that God's people were to enjoy the good world which God had made and would remake for them. They were to share its blessings with all other creatures which God likewise had brought into being for God's own purposes.

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Endnotes

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Two of Professor Sturm's recent essays directly address ecological or biospheric ethics with characteristic intensity and insight: "Faith, Ecology, and the Demands of Social Justice: On Shattering the Boundaries of Moral Community," in *Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility*, Donald A. Crosby and Charley D. Hardwich, eds., (New York: P. Lang, 1996); and "Koinonology and Ecological Principle," written as an epilogue to his book, *Solidarity and Suffering* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998).

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² See Lynn White, Jr.'s often cited contention in "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1205: "God planned all [creation] explicitly for man's benefit and rule; no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes." Others, too, criticized biblical texts for neglecting the value of nonhuman life-forms. See, Steven C. Rockefeller, "Faith and Community in an Ecological Age," in *Spirit and Nature*, Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, eds., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 148: "[T]he purpose of the creation of the universe is the establishment of a kingdom of God on earth by and for human beings." As to the "Christian right's" tendency to neglect biblical environmental concerns, see Chuck D. Barlow, "Why the Christian Right Must Protect the Environment," *British Columbia Environmental Affairs Law Review* 23 (1996): 781-91.

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³ See critiques by Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1960 [1923]), and by Gene McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, Dieter T. Hessel, ed., (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996) 31-44. Notable exceptions include: Jeremy Bentham,