

Please read the following passages from Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Psalms.

Gen. 1:26: Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.



The Gleaners, the famous portrait by Jean François Millet

Gen.1:28: God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’²⁹ God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.’³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. (Gen 1:28-30)

Gen. 2:4b: In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up— for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is

pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:4b-9)

Gen.3:17:And to the man he said,‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it”, cursed is the ground because of you;in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’ (Gen. 3:17-19)

Deut. 11:13 If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul— ¹⁴then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; ¹⁵and he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill. (Deut. 11:13-15)

Is.11:6:The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Is. 11:6-10)

Ps. 8: Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; ⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? ⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour. ⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Ps. 8)

Now, consider some questions about these passages.

- 1) How does God actually give life to his creation man?
- 2) What is man’s relationship with the land?
- 3) How is man’s relationship with the land changed by The Fall.
- 4) How is man to sustain himself – that is, what was evidently God’s original intention for man’s food?
- 5) What does the vision of Isaiah’s ‘Holy Mountain’ tell us about the perfected relationship between man and God’s creation that we will experience in the New Jerusalem?
- 6) What does Psalm 8 tell us about the sacredness of creation?

In the last week of April we are right in the middle of those days which our liturgical calendar calls “Rogation Days.” A common feature of these days in former times became known as “the beating the bounds.” This was where a procession of parishioners, led by the minister, churchwarden, and choirboys, would proceed around the boundary of their parish and pray for its protection in the forthcoming year. This was also known as ‘Gang-day’, after the old English name for going or walking. It was a feature inherited from an ancient Roman festival, when revelers would walk to a grove five miles from the city to perform their rites.¹ Rogation days were originally set apart by the Roman Catholic Church as a time to pray especially for God’s providence and protection on farmers and their crops. This is the most meaningful feature of these days for modern Christians.

The relationship between man and the earth is a unique one. First, there is the strange act of God’s creation of man which involves earth itself (or dust, which seems to be the most worthless of substances – a kind of detritus par-excellence). One of the interesting things that scholars have noticed about this is that the act of giving life to man through the ‘breathing’ or ‘Spiriting’ of life force into man’s nostrils is different from the creative act of every other living being.²

¹ Burriss, Eli Edward (1928). "Some Survivals of Magic in Roman Religion". *The Classical Journal (The Classical Association of the Middle West and South)* **24** (2): 112–123. [JSTOR 3289524](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3289524).

² Benson notes the (probably intentional) double entedre here for the Hebrew word used, which can mean both “breath” and “spirit.” See *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, Joseph Benson (Carlton & Porter, NY, 1857)

The connectivity between man and the earth is brought to even starker dimensions in the pronouncement of the Fall and its aftermath in Gen.3:10. This is the verse which every Episcopalian hears during the Ash Wednesday service when the celebrant marks people with a dusty cross on their foreheads, and intones the final words of this verse: “Dust you are, and to dust you will return.” Man and the land upon which we stand are, in some ways, inseparable.

The bond between man and the earth goes beyond the fact that the earth is the *materia-prima* for man’s creation, though. In the passages I listed from Gen. 1:26-29, and Gen. 2:8-9a, it would seem that the earth’s main function is to produce food for God’s prized creation, man. This was the original order of things; man was supposed to nourish himself from the plants that grew in the garden, and from the fruit of those plants. There is no mention in these verses of man eating meat. And in fact, when we read of how the Kingdom will be upon Christ’s return, when God’s order is restored we perceive that this order of being nourished from the fruits of the earth is actually restored. You can read about this in Isaiah’s prophetic vision of the new reign in Isaiah 11:6-10.

So must we live exclusively as vegetarians and refrain from slaying any form of animal life if we are to lead the life which God has planned for us? Not really. All through Scripture, animal sacrifice is prescribed by God in order for man to exhibit an appropriate devotion to the Creator. And Deuteronomy chapter 14 is full of rules governing the type of animals which the Israelites were to eat. But, as I write this Bible study, I’ve just been listening to an NPR broadcast where the commentary claimed that if everyone ate as much meat as Americans do, we’d need 4 worlds!

So, what is the way in which man is to relate to the other beings in God’s creation? I believe these may be best summarized in the passage I included from Deut. 11:13-15. It would appear that a Godly use of creation – including the animals created by God’s hand – requires immense respect; man needs to recognize that the animals of our world are also part of God’s sacred order of creation. And the fact that we are given the right to consume them for our well-being is an indication of an awesome holiness by which we are characterized in the eyes of God. You can be reminded of this by reading Psalm 8.

James Barnhill, 04/28/16.