

Covenant

St Mary's Homegroup studies
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St. Mary's Church
Haddenham

Covenant with all creatures

What is your favourite animal and why? How do you come into contact with animals through the week and through the year? You might like to discuss where these encounters are observation, where they are relationships and where they might be food! How do you feel when animals are mistreated by humans?

Humans have been relating to animals for thousands of years. We must have started by hunting animals but then found that some animals could be tamed and live with us. Animals such as dogs helped with herding or hunting, horses and oxen helped with ploughing and transport. Then we could also rear them for meat, dairy, wool and leather. It has been an ancient relationship that can be good on both sides, or can be very hurtful. Not surprisingly, the Bible has much to say about our relationship to God's creatures and it forms part of the very early teaching on covenant.

Covenant in creation

Read Genesis 1: 20-31

1. (verses 20-25) How did God view the creatures that he created? What did he command them to do?
2. (verses 26-30) What was the same about his creation of humans and what was different?
3. How would you interpret "rule over"?

The word 'covenant' is not used in the account of creation but it is clear that God makes a commitment to his creation as he forms it. God created a world where all living things could flourish, and he gave humans leadership over creation and the ability to respond wisely. Some Christians have, at times in history, seen this covenant as being between God and humans alone.

Creation, for them, is there merely to facilitate that relationship. But God made a commitment to the natural world through the very act of creating. He blessed the creatures and gave them fertility (Genesis 1:22). In Genesis 2, his placing of Adam in the garden to serve and protect it shows a commitment to all of creation, including humanity.¹

Covenant with all creatures

The story of God's relationship with humans and his wider creation unfolds as we read through Genesis. We will pick it up again with Noah, after the flood. Here the word 'Covenant' is used for the first time and we will see how God uses it to develop relationships.

Read Genesis 9: 1-17

4. In what ways is this passage similar to Genesis 1 and in what ways is it different?
5. What will we have to account for?
6. There are some sad things in this covenant – what are these and why might they have come about?
7. What are the positive things?

As you close this study, you might like to think how you could apply these covenants today. How should we live in the light of them?

Extension study

The terms of the covenant with Noah are set in the context of the violence that has precipitated the flood. It sets out ethical approaches to animals while acknowledging a different and poorer relationship between humans and animals. It warns that God will call us to account for our treatment of other humans and other creatures.

You may like to discuss whether the good treatment of animals should be a Christian concern and whether it is an area of discipleship that we have neglected.

¹ Edited extract from: Martin and Margot Hodson (2015) *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues*, Oxford: BRF, p. 56.