

Article of the Month

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Animals

Most human beings have a natural affinity for the animal world. Sometimes certain animals become “part of the family.” Sometimes we just admire certain creatures from a distance. In any case, there is a Scriptural record of what our God has in mind for the relationship of mankind and the lower animals.

The Bible shows an interesting *history* of the animal world. It also invents some *fictional* animals (like the unicorn, dragon, leviathan, and behemoth) to give us *symbolisms*. Also, for the sake of symbolisms, the Bible makes up animals which have characteristics of existing animals, but which cannot actually exist — like the beast with seven heads — or the beast which “devours the whole earth!” Likewise, animals which DO exist (lion, lamb, goat, serpent, etc. — sometimes with modifications) are used to symbolize other things or characteristics. In short, the Scriptures are full of animals in literal and in symbolic usages. This is true BECAUSE animals ARE so dear and meaningful to us.

In this article, we will attempt to glance briefly through the Scriptural record to see the literal part animals play in the Divine plan for man (past, present, and future) as well as a brief look at the symbolic part they play.

BEFORE MAN

We are in sympathy with true science. But we also cannot accept those positions of scientists based on speculation and scientific philosophies which contradict Scriptural testimony. The Biblical record before man is short and to the point. It accounts for eons of Divine activity in the creative work — NOT LITERAL DAYS! Those parts of the scientific record which have animals in existence LONG before man are not in conflict with Scripture. However, evolutionary concepts ARE in disharmony with the Word.

The first chapter of Genesis is very clear with some basic concepts. Vegetation occurs before animal life (1:11, 12). But even here, it is vital to note that it is stated that these plants reproduce “after their kind.” Fixity of species is a rule even before animals appear in the record. When animals do appear, they appear, as scientists confirm, in an order, with sea-creatures first, flying creatures next, and then larger sea animals. (Genesis 1:20-22) But, even here, let it be noted that the fixity-of-species rule remains. They are all said to reproduce “after their kind.”

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In Genesis 1:21, the NAS lists “great sea monsters.” The KJV calls them “whales.” Since whales are mammals, their appearance is more likely later in the creative chain. But some scientists have postulated that the very heavy dinosaurs (like the brontosaurus) likely preferred — or even needed — to walk around in the waters to support their immense weight. “Great sea monsters” may well be a reference to these creatures.

Ultimately, the most refined of animals appear (Genesis 1:24, 25). The specification of fixity-of-species continues. These produce “after their kind.” There has never been a single documentation of one species evolving into another. Therefore, we need no theory to prove a thesis which is without a single documentation. And, to those who accept the Divine record, we have the inspired Word that species are fixed — not evolving into other species.

Finally, the crowning achievement of the physical creation arrives. Man is created. (1:26-30)

MAN AND THE ANIMALS

The first account of man’s relationship to the animal creation is found in Genesis 1:28. We are there informed that the fish, the birds, and every living thing that moves on the earth are to be under man’s “rule.” ULTIMATELY that will actually come to pass. The 8th Psalm makes reference to this ultimate condition, and the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 2 says that “we do NOT YET see all things subjected to him (man).” In other words, MY! What a future is in store when the animal world and mankind are in perfect harmony!

There is likely no one who owns a cat or dog who doesn’t comprehend even in small part how wonderful a relationship can exist between man and the lower animals. If we can imagine the world when ALL the creatures love man and each other — when man understands and cares for all of the lower creation and BLESSES it — we are then imagining what SHALL BE.

It is interesting to note a “clue” in Genesis 1:29, 30. We are informed that PLANTS are food for not only man, but also for the animals of the time. The Scriptures elsewhere suggest that this non-meat-eating situation for man AND beast existed before the great flood and will once again exist when the Kingdom of God and Christ will be established.

We all know the motion-picture versions of the huge-toothed Tyrannosaurus Rex gobbling up other creatures. But even some in the scientific world have postulated that these brutes were vegetarian! Their tearing teeth were designed in order to tear up the fast-growing vegetation of their carboniferous age — virtually ripping apart such things as bamboo groves. The speculations of these scientists are in harmony with the Scriptural record.

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One of man's first assignments and privileges was to name the animals (Genesis 2:19, 20). This happened before there was a woman on the scene. While the exercise must have been exceedingly gratifying, it is made clear by the context that animal companionship was insufficient, even though it must have been inspiring.

After Adam's disobedience and his being expelled from the Garden of Eden, about 1600 years passed before Noah's great flood. During this time, we know that men herded flocks (Genesis 4:2). Any other relationship to the animals is not mentioned. Once the flood came, a part of Noah's commission was to preserve the animals along with eight humans. (Genesis 6:19-21) In the passage it is hinted at that man and the animals were yet vegetarian (verse 21).

It is heart-warming (though rarely mentioned) that "God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark." (8:1) Man's ultimate rule over the animals was yet in mind, and the preservation of the animals was as important as the preservation of mankind.

But something *changed* once they all departed from the ark. As Genesis 9:2, 3 explain, the animals from that point forward had a fear and terror of man. And the phrase, "into your hand they are given," sounds ominous. It is as if, once the flood was over, our relationship to the animal world became adversarial. It certainly seems so to our day.

Another *change* happened. Whereas plants had been the food of men and the lower creatures, it was now the time that carnivorous diets began (9:3). Since then until our day, it seems nothing has changed. But the promise of Isaiah 11:6-9 tells us that there will yet be that final change: "the lion will eat straw like the ox."

SYMBOLISMS

The use of animals — or even of ONE SPECIFIC animal — in a symbolic sense could be the topic of a book! We will only touch on a few examples. Both Jesus and Satan are referred to as lions — probably because each is the mighty ruler of his domain.

Empires are symbolized by animals. In Daniel 7, Babylon is symbolized by a lion with wings. The Medo-Persian Empire is symbolized by a bear. Greece is represented by a winged leopard with four heads! All of these descriptions are carefully designed to be parts of prophecies which let us know of *characteristics* of these empires. In this same context, the Roman Empire is *beyond comparison* to any known animal!

Powers even greater than these nationalistic empires are symbolized by animals. Sometimes these great human institutions are so unique and overpowering that the Lord found it necessary to *invent* animals to represent them. For instance, Job 40:15-24 introduces us to the "Behemoth." The word has come to mean almost anything that is huge, threatening, and invincible. The Lord uses this fictitious beast in Job to

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represent the enormous and dominant false Christianity which has dominated western civilization since the days of Rome.

Job 41 and Isaiah 27 introduce us to “Leviathan.” This beast apparently represents civil power as Satan’s tool for the control of mankind over the ages. Thus, both Behemoth and Leviathan are much larger than the beasts which picture individual empires or kingdoms.

It might be helpful to note that this practice of assigning animals to represent countries is something common in our world. It is not just a Biblical usage. Thus the bear represents Russia, the Lion is used to represent England. The United States is represented by an Eagle. The list goes on. The fact is, when the Lord uses symbolisms, He does so because they are meaningful to those who study His word. Symbols make sense. And they often are closely allied in meaning to the way we perceive things in the natural world. Animal characteristics are so common to humans that we frequently use them as everyday expressions. “He is as gentle as a dove.” “Watch him! He’s a snake!” “A leopard can’t change his spots.” Biblical symbols are no different from human ones!

IN THE END

Man’s innate desire to have harmony with the animal creation seems worldwide. We worry about extinction of species — even insects! We have societies designed to prevent cruelty to animals. Even in the slaying of animals for human consumption, we have the sensibilities to make laws to make the process as “humane” as possible.

But on a more intimate level, we just LOVE animals. We love to talk to them, to play with them, to cuddle up to them, to spend time in their company, to rely on their peculiar animal talents — like the scent-following abilities of dogs, or the pleasurable ride on horses. We love to behold their fascinating feather colors, to hear their varied forms of communication. We could spend much time and space talking about what we love about them. And, likely, we all think how wonderful it would be to be able to befriend them all! That WAS the case in Eden. It WILL BE the case again. This was a part of Paul’s rejoicing over the 8th Psalm in his treatise in Hebrews 2.

Paul quotes the Psalm, including, “Thou (God) hast put all things in subjection under his (man’s) feet.” But then Paul laments: “We DON’T SEE THAT yet! But we DO see Jesus...who tasted death for everyone.” Paul is assuring us that we have seen the BEGINNINGS of God’s “way out” for man — and for the animals. The day is at hand when man will be perfected and will become “ruler” over a perfected earth. This will include a loving communion and harmony with all of the animal world. Our imaginations are too small to know what all that will mean. But we must all know instinctively that it will be wonderful to the extreme!
