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ALL That Have Breath: A Biblical Study of Animals in Scripture and Their Valued Place in God's Creation

By Suzanne R. Buerer

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A Biblical Study of Animals in Scripture and Their Valued Place in God's Creation



Insightful — a Strong Case for God's Salvation of His Animals

Suzanne R. Buerer

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: The Importance of Animals to Go	d 7
Blessings and Commands	7
Rulership and Responsibility	9
The Importance of Animal Relationships	
with Man	13
Covenants	14
Endowments and Gifts	17
God's Attention to His Animals	24
Chapter 2: Side By Side - We're In This	
Together	31
Rules that Apply to Both Man and Animal	
Animals Get What Humans Get	41
Chapter 3: Knowing and Loving God	51
Animals Knowing God	
Love and Nobility	54
Chapter 4: Animal Treatment	57
Biblical Laws Regarding Animals	
Applications of Humane Treatment	
Chapter 5: Animal Sacrifice and Value	75
The Significance of Animal Sacrifice	75
Future Sacrificial System	84

Suzanne R. Buerer

Chapter 6: Flesh and Spirit	93
Life in the Blood	93
All Flesh	96
Spirit	98
Chapter 7: God Saves	115
All Look to God to be Saved	116
Seek God	131
Love God	135
Fear God	137
Knowledge of God	145
Like a Child	148
Creation Proclaims God's Salvation	150
All Rejoice	161

Chapter 1:

The Importance of Animals to God

The Bible shows repeatedly that God cares about and for the animals that He created. He blesses them, commands them, makes covenants with them, watches over them, and knows them. I'd like to point out several ways that the animals themselves are significant to God.

Blessings and Commands

Who were the ones to first receive a blessing from God in the Bible? You may be surprised to learn that it was not humans, it was animals. The first blessing in the Bible was God's blessing of the water creatures and birds, just them - humans weren't around yet!

Gen. 1:22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

(Note: The land animals were also to multiply and be fruitful, but this wasn't specifically mentioned in the

Suzanne R. Buerer

Bible until they were coming out of the ark after the flood, and God was speaking to Noah. (Gen. 8:17))

God spoke *directly* to the water creatures and birds in the blessing, telling them to be fruitful and to multiply, in the waters and on the earth. It's interesting to note that perhaps for the birds God said "on the earth" instead of "in the air" because they nest and reproduce on the ground, in trees, or on rocks. Also, before the fall, the birds would not have been eating flying creatures yet - it would've only been plant foods <u>on</u> the earth.

In fact, God originally specifically gave plants as food for the birds and all the breathing land animals:

Gen. 1:29-30 Then God said, "...And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

So we see that God blessed and personally commanded His animals.

Rulership and Responsibility

God originally blessed the male and female humans also and told them to rule over the animals. Right before that, He told the humans to fill the earth and subdue it:

Gen. 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

The "subdue" was of the <u>earth</u>. That which was to be filled was also to be subdued. It does **not** specifically say for man to *subdue* animals, but it does say to *rule* them, as does this Psalm:

Psalm 8:6-9 You made him ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Now, ruling can be done for the benefit of those ruled, or it can be done primarily for the benefit of the ruler to the detriment of the ruled. Which is the better ruler?

A good ruler cares for the health and welfare of those ruled, working toward a strong and happy community. A bad ruler oppresses those ruled and uses them and resources with little heed for their welfare. So our being commanded to rule the animals does not automatically infer that they are simply there for our use or consumption with little attention to their needs.

In fact, ruling implies responsibility. Ideally rulers should be trusted and looked up to by the ones they rule, protect the community, maintain a healthful environment, and provide guidance, justice, and possibly some direction for them. It's what good rulers do. Noah is an example of leading for the benefit of those led - he brought animals on and off the ark, for the purpose of saving them and obeying God. (Gen. 6:19, Gen. 7:2-3, Gen. 8:17)

Keep in mind also that the original command for both man and woman to rule the animals was given before the fall into sin and death. This rulership originally pertained to the good creation, when killing and death were not in the picture. It was rulership over a

peaceable kingdom and the Garden of Eden. It was intended as a good rulership, where Good prevailed.

In some cases later, God specifically gave rulership of both animals and people in the same breath (the <u>same</u> "rulership" word), such as to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and might and glory; in your hands He has placed <u>mankind and the beasts of the field and birds of the air</u>. Wherever they live, He has made you <u>ruler over them all</u>..." (Daniel 2:37-38)

One's first impulse might be to think that it would be mighty hard to rule birds of the sky, but their homes, water, and much of their food is on the earth, so man can and does have a great effect on the birds of the sky - not to mention other effects such as the hunting and domestication of birds as well, as was done then and now.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, he was sent a dream that depicted his rulership as a great and mighty tree: "Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed". (Daniel 4:12) Obviously this depiction of rulership, given by God,

was of benefit to all, including the animals, and not a hardship. And when the angel in the dream said, "Cut down the tree... Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches" (Daniel 4:14), that showed the results of rulership removed (by God). The animals lost the benefits of good rulership.

The angel also said, "Let him... share earth's verdure with the beasts. Let his mind be altered from that of a man, and let him be given the mind of a beast... so that all creatures may know that the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man, and He gives it to whom He wishes and He may set over it even the lowest of men." (Daniel 4:12-14 (JPS Tanakh (Jewish Bible))) In other words, it was to show to Nebuchadnezzar, humans, and animals that God (not man) has the ultimate sovereignty and gives rulership of man's kingdom and of animals as He wishes.

An example of bad rulership affecting animals is stated in Nehemiah: "On account of our sins (the land) yields its abundant crops to kings whom You have set over us. They rule over our bodies and our beasts as they please, and we are in great distress!" (Neh. 9:37 (JPS Tanach)) - operative words here being "as they please" - the benefit is going mainly to the kings, not to the people and animals.

In fact, Man's original responsibility was to cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden – mankind, the ruler, was to take care of it:

Gen. 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

So man's rulership of the animals does not mean that they exist solely for man's use and consumption – man is responsible to some degree for their care and livelihood.

The Importance of Animal Relationships with Man

God wanted to provide Adam with a helper, and the <u>animals</u> were initially presented to Adam as potential associates. (Gen. 2:18, Gen. 2:20) It would seem that candidates even being considered as helpmates for the man were at a respectable enough level that they were not simply creatures made only for the use of man, as some claim. And although the animals were not found suitable as helpmates who would totally assuage Adam's aloneness, there have been relationships between man and animals, such as a man and his dog, his horse, or his oxen, that are quite close and successful for working <u>together</u> to accomplish a task.

Another reason God brought the animals to Adam was to see what he would call them. All beasts and birds were given names by Adam. The Bible says the man assigned names to "all" the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to "every" beast of the field. So it may even be possible that he was not just naming species or kinds, but personally naming each individual animal.

Names are important in the Bible, especially the name of God. God personally or through angels specifically dictated what the names of certain important unborn people were to be. It is interesting to note that there is no report of inanimate objects being named by Adam – perhaps it wasn't worthy of mention. It is only Adam's fellow living creatures, the beasts, the birds, and his wife. And God personally brought them to be named, so it was significant. (Gen. 2:19-20) By the way, God Himself named "Adam" ("man" or "mankind"). (Gen. 5:2)

Covenants

One might think that biblical covenants were only between God and man, but God made covenants with His animals, too.

God established a covenant with all of the <u>animals</u> that departed the ark - never again would He destroy all by flood. The rainbow is a sign to all, animals included. God established the covenant with Noah and his sons too, of course, but God repeatedly said the covenant is between Him and <u>all flesh</u> and specifically named them out:

Gen. 9:8-13, Gen. 9:16 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock and all wild animals... every living creature on earth. I establish My covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood... This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth... Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

A future covenant with God that includes the animals is recorded in Hosea: "In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the

air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that <u>all</u> may lie down in safety." (Hos. 2:18) The covenant of war abolishment and peace and safety is for the humans and animals, that none will harm another.

It possibly relates to the peaceable kingdom written of by Isaiah, where humans <u>and animals</u> will know God and live in a truly good, God-honoring way:

Isa. 11:6-9 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

That last verse clarifies that the <u>animals</u> will neither harm nor destroy, because they, as part of the earth, will be full of the knowledge of the Lord – <u>abundantly</u> full of it, as the waters cover the sea! If you have ever seen the sea, you know this is a very large expanse. The animals will be abundantly *filled* with the knowledge of

the Lord and behave accordingly, as God wishes them to do. The above scripture specifically says animals will do this and gives several examples of them doing so.

There are some who say that only man can have knowledge and obey God's law. But clearly the above passages show that animals can and will be full of the knowledge of God, obeying His law of love themselves.

Endowments and Gifts

God created the animals according to their kinds, with differences between them, all of which were good:

Gen. 1:25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

We can observe that He gave remarkably good gifts to the animals, which He did not give to humans. On the animals He bestowed gifts especially for them.

Consider how God gave the ability to fly to birds, bats, and insects (not humans). Think of it - to the "lowly" bug, He gave the dance of flight! How mankind has wished for that one!

Suzanne R. Buerer

Most animals received sharper senses of smell and hearing by far than what humans have. Sometimes we humans, based on our own experience, forget that or don't understand. A human walking a dog with a leash often has no patience when the dog stops to sniff something – for crying out loud, what could be so fascinating about the base of that tree? The human drags the dog on. But to the dog it was something fascinating to read. Conversely, a dog just doesn't understand why a human sits motionless, staring at a book. Good grief, what is so fascinating about a hunk of paper to warrant that kind of attention? Way to waste the day! He's not even sniffing it, for heaven's sake! But to the human, it is fascinating to read. We each have our own gifts and skills.

Animals were given beautiful silky-soft and/or thick fur, bright-feathered, warm plumage, or iridescent, colorful scales - we are mostly naked. Eagles were given very keen eyesight, and bees were given the ability to see phosphorescence. Large animals were given great physical power and strength. Many animals can run much faster and jump much farther than we can. Some animals sense oncoming earthquakes or storms. The spider is an incredible architect, being able to gauge distances, plan, and discern where to anchor

and build her web – sometimes the anchor points are a real architectural marvel!

The list goes on and on. Humans are not the only ones of significance with wonderful gifts such as our brains and opposable thumbs - God gave significant gifts to His other creatures too, especially for them, in their own right, and not for us.

God originally gave the breathing animals the gift of every kind of "green plant" as food. The humans were also originally given for food every seed-bearing plant and every tree with seed-bearing fruit (grain, fruit), with the exception of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Theoretically the animals were not to eat of that tree either!) Before the Fall and its introduction of death, food was essentially plant-based. (Gen. 1:29-30)

Even after the Fall, dogs and cats eat grass still. Dogs of mine have loved peas, corn, brussels sprouts, broccoli, and spinach. One of my cats likes oatmeal with blueberries and also meatless fennel/lentil stew. (My dogs absolutely adore that stew!) And in the peaceable time to come, animals will eat plant foods and not meat again, as originally designed. (Peaceable kingdom – lions eating straw, no harming/killing, etc.)

In fact, animals were not given by God as food to humans until <u>after</u> the flood. However, they were at times used as offerings to God prior to the flood. The earliest example is Abel the shepherd who brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock as an offering to God. (Gen. 4:2-4)

After the flood, when giving the animals to man as food, God also placed fear and dread of man upon all animals, birds, and fish. God told Noah and his sons:

Gen. 9:2-3 The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

He *now* gave everything. Until this time, meat had not been designated by God as food for man, although burnt offerings already occurred. Even Noah's sacrifice of clean animals when everyone had come out of the ark was done <u>before</u> God gave the animals as food and while they did not yet fear man. (Gen. 8:20)

Consider this – for the 1500 or so years prior to the flood, after the Fall, animals presumably did not innately fear man. And when God did give animals as food for man after the flood, he gave the animals the fear of man at the same time. For whose benefit was that? The animals'! If the primary purpose of animals is to feed man, then why make them fear man? God could have left them unsuspecting and easily slaughtered! But God gave the animals the fear of man when he gave them as food, for their own sake.

Speaking of animal deaths serving man, one of the first things after the Fall and introduction of death was God making garments of animal skin for Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:21) God Himself utilized animal product for the good of man. We know nothing about the manner in which it was obtained by God, but there are many references to the humane treatment of animals in the Bible that I am covering separately. The odd point being placed before you now is that animals weren't given as food to man yet, but their skins were given to cover man's nakedness and to provide warmth and protection when man was expelled from the Garden of Eden. Perhaps the one was needed for survival of the elements outside the Garden, while vegetables, beans, fruits, grains, and dairy were sufficient food? I think the main thing we can draw from this is that the use of dead

animal products such as leather is condoned in the Bible (post-Fall). How the animals are to be treated is a separate topic in this book.

On the other side of the coin, there are a few times mentioned in the Bible when God gives humans He has slain to birds and beasts as food! I found the most explicit to be *Ezek*. 39:17-20. In that passage, God says to the animals to come to His feast table that He is preparing for them, where they will eat the flesh of mighty men and soldiers. (Understandably the main point of those verses, however, is God's punishment of those men.)

An example of future good things/gifts including animals besides mankind: It is written in Ezekiel that the streams of living water coming out from under the new Temple will have fish living and thriving in them:

Ezek. 47:9-10 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore... There will be places for spreading nets.

The fish will thrive and the fishermen also. God gives life to all His living beings, and the streams of living water from the new Temple benefit the fish too. The flowing water is also for the trees along the banks of the river:

Ezek. 47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

Please note that the above reference helps clarify that God provides healing through the leaves of trees (and through many other plant sources as well). Even in the time to come He will do this.

Medicines and herbal remedies have been used throughout history, for humans and animals, and God is the source of the materials used, primarily through His plants and by His design. Those who refuse medicine, fearing faith in science instead of God, might want to consider the source - God. Some people might think that medicine is only derived from technology and science totally without God, but it's not. God provides the plants and the substances - and the healing that they are intended by Him to help facilitate. One should be

aware that medicine can be a way that God Himself provides healing, and not necessarily reject it. It is a gift to thank God for.

God's Attention to His Animals

God keeps an eye on all of His animals, and He knows them all. God takes care of His own - and the animals are HIS. Scripture speaks quite clearly about this. For example, God specifically remembered the animals that were on the ark:

Gen. 8:1 But God <u>remembered</u> Noah <u>and all the wild</u> <u>animals and the livestock</u> that were with him in the ark.

The animals on the ark would likely have multiplied during the year they were on the ark, probably resulting in more animals exiting the ark than having entered it, and God remembered them <u>all</u>. The Bible even says that the animals came out by their <u>families</u>:

Gen. 8:19 (JPS Tanakh) Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by <u>families</u>.

God focuses on and cares for <u>all</u> of His living creatures. It is a <u>personal</u> relationship where He knows them, and they are His:

Psalm 50:10-13 For every animal of the forest is <u>Mine</u>, and the cattle on a thousand hills. <u>I know every</u> bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are <u>Mine</u>. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for <u>the world</u> is Mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

Your dog is God's. Your cat is God's. He knows them, and His eye is on them. Your dear little one is in the loving hands of God. God knows and remembers the steer that you eat and the horse that you ride. Every one of them is His, and He provides for them.

Psalm 104:14, Psalm 104:24-25, Psalm 104:27-28 He makes grass grow for the cattle... How many are Your works, O LORD! In wisdom You made them all; the earth is full of your creatures... living things both large and small... These all look to You to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

Psalm 145:9, Psalm 145:15-17, Psalm 145:19, Psalm 145:21 The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made... The eyes of all look to You, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The LORD is...loving toward all He has made...He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them... Let every creature praise His holy name for ever and ever.

Even when animals fall under the same calamity as humans, God is totally aware of how it's affecting the animals and specifically notes their suffering, not just that of humans alone. Example - this is <u>God</u> speaking:

Jer. 14:1, Jer. 14:5-6 (JPS Tanakh) The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts:... "Even the hind in the field forsakes her new-born fawn, because there is no grass. And the wild asses stand on the bare heights, snuffing the air like jackals; their eyes pine, because there is no herbage."

In the book of Job, God Himself points out that He takes care of the wilderness where there are no humans. It's not just the places where man is, but <u>all</u> His creation that matters to God, whether man is in that place or not. God says: "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain,

and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?" (Job 38:25-27) Answer: God. He provides for lands where man is not there.

God says, "Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout." (Job 39:5-7) Answer: God. He is specifically pointing out that He deliberately chooses to free animals from man sometimes.

For God's pleasure He created all things. There are places such as deep seas, caves, dense jungles, outer space, even microorganisms, that man rarely sees or just now is discovering, which are incredibly beautiful and wondrous. Some people seem to think it a waste that such would exist if man wasn't experiencing and enjoying it, or that animals and nature's beauty were created for just man's benefit, but God made creation for His pleasure. The book of Hebrews says, "God, for whom and through whom everything exists." (Hebrews 2:10) Note the "for". God created animals for Himself and takes pleasure in them specifically, whether man is involved or not.

In fact, the creation of the animals of the sea, the air, and the land, was itself good, even before man was created. (Gen. 1:21, Gen. 1:25) Once everything was created, it was "very good" (not just good!). "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Gen. 1:31) The finished creation, in its entirety, was very good, not just the humans. This is before the Fall, before any "need" for meat, the animals were THERE, and God saw that it was good.

Jesus, while teaching not to worry about the necessities of life, points out that God takes care of His animals and clothes plants in beauty:

Matt. 6:26-30 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you?

God generously and wondrously takes care of His creatures and plants, as anyone who goes out and communes with nature can see – it is beautiful of itself without the hand of man involved.

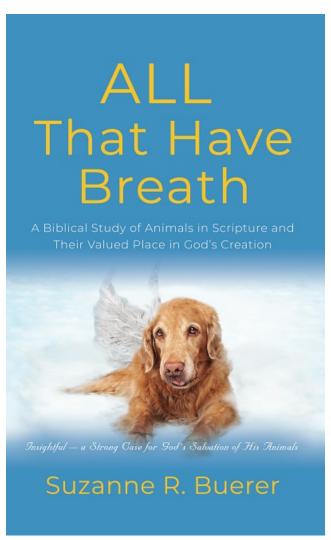
I want to point out something here about degree. Some people assume that since humans are worth more, than the birds and animals are not of worth. This is a false assumption. I am reminded of the Sesame Street © program, where it would teach, "BIG!" and show a large thing or animal. Then it would say "BIGGER!" and show something bigger. Then it would say "BIGGEST!" and show something that was biggest of the three. Now, the fact that the first was not biggest doesn't mean that it was not big. It WAS big. And so humans being more valuable than animals does not mean that animals are not valuable. In fact, they *ARE* valuable to their Creator. God knows everything that is going on within His creation and cares about <u>all</u> of it:

Luke 12:6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet <u>not one of them</u> is forgotten by God.

1 Cor. 8:6 Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from Whom all things came and for Whom we live.

Suzanne R. Buerer

Mal. 2:10 Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?



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