

Chapter Two

In the Beginning

THE VISION OF THE LATTER PROPHETS—OF A TIME when the lion will lie down with the lamb and all earth's creatures will live in peace with each other—seems an impossible dream. It seems impossible because human beings have chosen to believe that both animals and people are violent by nature. Since this is held to be a self-evident truth, any information that casts doubt on its credibility is rejected. So the creed remains intact; having evolved from animals, the worst behavior of human beings simply confirms the fact that they have not yet outgrown their barbarism.

This view of a world in the process of evolving from barbarism to civilization can be a comforting one. No matter how badly people or societies may behave, they have come a long way from their primitive beginnings. Patience must be exhibited with *homo sapiens*: Evolving from barbarism is no easy

task. The dogma is different for animals. It is generally believed that they were biologically doomed to violence, that their genes are somehow permanently programmed for killing. This belief system conveniently overlooks the facts of conditioning and adaptation. It dismisses the possibility that having become conditioned to violence, some species eventually adapted to such behavior.

The biblical view of natural history contradicts the theory that the human race has evolved over long periods of time to its present, higher, development. In fact, the Bible tells a story of regression, not progression.

The Book of Genesis reports that both animals and humans were created with a nonviolent nature, that goodness was their innate characteristic. Genesis tells the story of creatures whose natural condition is one of peaceful coexistence with their own species and with all other species. And although all have fallen from a higher state, their innate goodness—their nonviolent nature—remains waiting to be reactivated.

Even though they have adapted to a violent lifestyle, both animals and humans can readapt to their original peaceful natures. It is on this foundational truth that the millennial vision of the Latter Prophets was based. It was this truth that undergirded their vision of a time when, once again, humans and nonhumans would live together peaceably, in a peaceable world. It would be a world free from the fear and suffering that earth's creatures have unleashed upon themselves.

Like the prophets who linked the fate of men and animals in a millennial future, the Book of Genesis links them in their far-distant past. Both humans and animals were created as extensions of God's love and goodness. All creatures had within them the same "breath of life." (Gen.6:17) All were given the

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same instructions to “be fruitful and increase in number.” In this picture of paradise, the man and woman were loving and trusted caregivers for the creatures among whom they lived. Theirs was a relationship of trust and leadership—not of dominance or exploitation.

The nonviolent nature of all earth’s inhabitants is further delineated in the biblical report of God’s plan for the sustenance of all creatures. Food was provided only from the bounty of the earth; no creature was to feed on another:

Then God said [to the man and the woman], “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be for your food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that He had made and it was very good. (Gen. 1:29–31 NIV)

There is no information regarding the amount of time it took for this idyllic existence to end, but the third chapter of Genesis reports a degeneration that has already taken place. The man and woman have chosen to partake of evil; they have chosen to “know” good and evil (Gen. 3:22), where before they had “known” only the good.

Once they had chosen to know evil the degeneration of Adam and Eve reached the point where they were no longer able to respect or abide by the rules of a paradisiacal existence. Consequently, they had to leave Eden. Their new environment reflected their regressive behavior.

Because humans were their leaders, the animals reflected their fall from a higher estate. In our age of ecological concern

God's Covenant with Animals

it is easier to understand how the negative behavior of human beings adversely affected the life around them. It reached the point that the very earth was “cursed.”

Cursed is the ground because of you . . . it will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the fields by the sweat of your brow. (Gen. 3:17–19 NIV)

No longer would the lush bounty of earth automatically provide Adam and Eve with nourishment, and the animals would share the human fate of having to labor and forage for their food. Together all had enjoyed an Edenic existence; together they had deteriorated from their high estate. The Book of Genesis records that together they continued to deteriorate until, at last, the earth could no longer support the violence of its inhabitants. “The earth was corrupt in God’s sight and full of violence.” (Gen. 6:11)

The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. . . . So the Lord said: I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—man and animals and creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them. (Gen. 6:5, 7 NIV)

The waters of a great flood would wash away this uncivilized civilization. But a remnant would survive. The Lord spoke to Noah; he and his family would be saved from the coming catastrophe—however, there was a condition to be fulfilled: If they were to survive they had to fulfill their role as

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caregivers for the animals. Nonhumans as well as humans had to be provided with safe passage.

Noah's commission to provide for the animals is a story of crucial importance. The Bible has already told how God gave human beings responsibility for the care and welfare of other creatures at the time of Creation; how, by the time of the Flood, they had already corrupted themselves and abused that responsibility. Nevertheless, the Scriptures make it clear that accountability for the animals would continue to be a fact of human existence. Without safe passage for them, there would be no safe passage for Noah and his family.

It took a prodigious amount of time and work for Noah to construct something large enough to contain all the creatures who were to survive the Flood. It took an enormous effort for him to fulfill his responsibility as caregiver for the other creatures of earth. But if he and his family were to survive as a species, they had to fulfill their caregiving role. The animals who survived—like Noah and his family—were individually called to be saved from the Flood. God communicated His message to specific animals and, two by two, they presented themselves to Noah:

And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, and of all creatures ... *came to Noah* and entered the ark. (Gen. 7:7, 8–9 NIV emphasis added)

Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them *came to Noah* and entered the Ark. (Gen. 7:15 NIV emphasis added)