

A Principle of Christian Stewardship

There are several factors to consider when exploring biblical teachings of stewardship and more specifically, stewardship of God's creation. They include: ownership and value, the authority, responsibility and accountability of stewards, plus consequences of good and bad stewardship.

God Retains Ownership of Creation

Who owns creation? This is a simple question, both to understand and to answer. Yet, the issue of ownership is one that man struggles with continually. Through the ages, men have disputed with one another and God over who holds title to the earth. Abraham and Lot's servants fought over grazing and water rights. The birthright dispute between Jacob and Esau was really about who would control the land and resources passed down from Abraham and Isaac. Israel's repeated battles with her neighbors were usually over who would occupy the land and have use of its resources. Throughout history, most wars have been over land. Examination of the motives behind the wars and conquests of Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, Ghangis Khan, William the Conqueror, and Adolf Hitler disclose a common thread: Man's desire to control land and resources is frequently a basic cause of conflict.

Despite man's history of conflicts in order to own and control land and natural resources, scripture teaches God created all things and everything still belongs to Him! In Leviticus, 25:23 God it made clear He retains ownership of Creation and mankind are guest boarders on earth. "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (See Strong's Hebrew #1616 & #8453 for definitions of strangers and sojourners) He made a similar point in Psalms 50:10-12 where, thru the Psalmist, God declares: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." The Apostle Paul reaffirmed the principle of God's creating and owning Creation in Colossians 1:16-17. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." Inferred from Paul's statement "all things were created by him, and for him" is that God retains ownership of all things he created for his own purpose and use.

It is not just land that God owns and uses. Psalms 50 also indicates He retains ownership of natural resources. The text implies He owns all food sources, whether from beasts, forest, cattle, etc.. Moreover, Haggai 2:8 indicates minerals, even after

they are refined, still belong to God. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.”

God Values Creation

The context of Haggai 2:8, is God instructing Israel how to rebuild the Temple. It suggests God has definite ideas about how we use His natural resources. This is because He values the things He created. The Genesis account contains expressions and accounts that allude to God valuing creation. Seven places in Genesis chapter one describe God as seeing Creation as good. The seventh citation is a recap in which God sees all he had already created and affirms it as “very good”. “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31) In context, a reasonable case can be made that the word good has moral implications with respect to Creation obeying God’s commands to exist exactly as He purposed and was thereby morally acceptable to God. In addition, good could indicate God valuing Creation with aesthetic appreciation, in the sense of beauty as an artist might admire his handiwork. Good may also allude to God valuing the usefulness of Creation. (The Book of Job God uses the strength and fierceness of leviathan and behemoth to imply the greatness of His power and glory in relation to things he created. See Job chapters 40.41)

God providing for increase of his creation also suggests He values what He made. Just as an inventor would not want to reproduce a product that does not meet his requirements for usefulness and attractiveness, it is unlikely God would command His creation to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:22, 2) if it was if no value to Him.

Another evidence of God valuing Creation is that He assigned man to care for it. From the beginning, God showed particular interest in how man minds His Creation. While man was still in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden God commanded Adam to “dress and keep it”. His command suggests Adam was to be a protector and preserver of the Garden. Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary defines keep as: “08104. rmv shamar shaw-mar’; a primitive root; properly, to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to, etc.:—beward, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep(-er, self), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save (self), sure, (that lay) wait (for), watch(-man). Assigning Adam responsibility for keeping the garden, presumably to protect it from exploitation, indicates God values His Creation. Moreover, the instructions God gave man (beginning with His instructions to Adam) as to how to keep Creation suggest He values what He made. An example of this is God commanding man to observe a sabbath every seven years for the land to rest. “But

in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.”(Leviticus 25:4)

One may point to the curse placed upon the earth as a consequence of original sin (Genesis 3:17) as evidence God’s appreciation of creation ended with the transgression; therefore man’s dominion is now unfettered. However, while it is true God cursed the ground, the text suggests His reason for doing so was against man because of his disobedience and not against the ground per se. Far from rejecting His Creation it seems God gave it another use. Making Creation less hospitable served God’s purpose as a constant reminder to man of his own sinfulness and the righteousness of God who punishes sin. Moreover, scripture indicates even after God cursed the earth He continued to use Creation to express his glory. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.” (Psalms 19:1-3) (See also Psalms 8 & 97) In Luke’s gospel Jesus indicated if need be God would use the rocks to praise the Savior. “And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke 19:37-40)

Many other instances of God showing value for his creation are evident in how He uses it; such as the flood, parting the Red Sea and use of famine and pestilence in judgment.

Stewardship: Authority, Responsibility, Accountability

As previously discussed, Adam was God’s first steward. God assigned him to dress and keep the garden, to take care of it. Furthermore, beginning with Adam, God gave mankind dominion over nature. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26) It is interesting to note giving man dominion over nature and making him in God’s likeness are presented together in the Genesis account. Their appearance together gives rise to the question; in as much as God made man in his own image should not man rule nature in God’s image, with behavior that mirrors the Lord’s value for His creation?

Authority: The concept of stewardship presented by scripture applies to man's dominion over nature (Genesis 1:26). David's observation recorded in Psalm's chapter eight indicates man's authority over nature extends beyond Eden and past the flood. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." (Psalms 8:6-8)

In Luke 12: 42-43 the Savior stated: "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." This text indicates a steward is a ruler and a servant. He oversees (as a ruler) the possessions of another (as a servant). In the context of the lesson, the Savior teaches God's disciples are stewards of earth. The phrase "portion of meat in due season" suggests stewardship applies to the things of nature. Strong's Concordance provides this definition for a steward: "a house-distributor (i.e. manager), or overseer, i.e. an employee in that capacity; by extension, a fiscal agent (treasurer); figuratively, a preacher (of the Gospel):— chamberlain, governor, steward . This definition implies authority, responsibility and accountability. A steward rules as an agent. He oversees by an authority received from the owner of the possessions he manages. He has authority over the possessions placed in his care, to see that they are properly used and kept.

What did God intend when He gave mankind dominion over nature? Strong's Concordance indicates dominion means subjugation; that man has rule over nature: 07287. *radah* raw-daw'; a primitive root; to tread down, i.e. subjugate; specifically, to crumble off:— (come to, make to) have dominion, prevail against, reign, (bear, make to) rule, (-r, over), take. However, because man's authority over nature is based on his status as God's steward, dominion does not mean man is free to use nature however he wishes. This is so because man is accountable to God as to how he rules Creation. Stewardship is middle management. It is a link in God's chain of command. Man may be the boss of nature, but God is the boss of man. Thus, man's authority exists according to God's will as expressed by statutes and examples in His holy word. This is consistent with a chain of authority principle stated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3. "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

As God's middle managers, stewards do not set policy. Their job is to carry out, or implement policies that were established and passed down by God, who is upper management. Second Chronicles 7:14 is an example of how God sets policy and gives man authority to implement. "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I

command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” In the context of God accepting the Temple Solomon built, He established a policy in which idolatry would be punished by ruin coming upon the land and people. However, the policy also included God’s mercy in which He would heal the land if the people repented and turned back to Him. This policy tied crop yield directly to obeying God. Once established, how the policy would be implemented was based on the behavior of the people. In this way, the people influenced whether the land would produce bounty or famine.

In addition to God’s Holy word revealing man’s God-given authority over nature, it also prescribes principles and examples of how God wants His creation managed. It tells man what kind of manager God wants him to be. This is evident in the details and instructions God’s word provides for man’s stewardship of Creation. (This is addressed in more detail in the discussion of the responsibilities of stewardship.) It is also evident in that God has retained ultimate dominion over all his Creation. Moreover, because God retains supreme dominion over Creation, man’s dominion is subordinate to, and properly functions within the framework of God’s dominion. Evidence of God’s greater dominion is apparent in His ability to control nature in ways man cannot. For instance, the Apostle’s were amazed at Jesus’ extraordinary power over nature when He calmed the seas. “And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matthew 8:26-27) Furthermore, God’s complete authority over nature will be both obvious and indisputable when Jesus returns to raise the dead and destroys the heavens and earth at the end of time. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10)

The authority of dominion does not give God’s stewards license to be despots or abusers. It may require tough choices at times, but whatever the choice its ultimate purpose is to please the owner, who is God. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of how to correctly use authority. On several occasions during his life on the Earth,

people observed that Jesus spoke with and exercised authority. (See Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:22, 27, Mark 13:34, Luke 4:36, Luke 9:1, John 5:27) Sometimes He was critical, using His authority to oppose some person, group or custom as was the case when he drove the moneychangers from the Temple, and when He pronounced woe against the scribes and Pharisees. (Matthew 21:12-13, Matthew 23) He also used his authority to comfort, heal and teach people. (See Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 12:32, Matthew 5, Mark 6:34) However, all the Savior did, in every incident in which He exercised authority, He did so according to God's will. Not only so, Jesus repeatedly indicated he was acting in compliance with God's will, in His Father's interests; that He used His authority within the boundaries of the God's mandate to save the Elect. (John 6:38, 8:29, 14:31)

Jesus rebuked James and John for offering to call down fire, use nature, to destroy the Samaritans that would not receive the Savior because he journeyed to Jerusalem. "And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." (Luke 9:54-55) The offer violated James and John's authority on at least two levels: 1. As Apostles called to minister to God's people, they ignored the fact that God had a people among the Samaritans (See John 4:726); and, 2. What they proposed was an abuse of power. Clearly, the Savior was not pleased with them proposing to use their dominion of nature to satisfy their own passions of anger and revenge. The second point is important in thinking about how man may properly use dominion over nature. James and John cited the account of Elijah calling fire from heaven to slay the two Captains of Fifty as grounds for their proposed action. (See 2 Kings 1:1-17) However, the circumstances were different. The Captains of Fifty were carrying out the orders of Ahaziah, who rejected God and worshipped Baalzebub. Elijah, as God's prophet, was opposing a leader who worshipped a false god and demanded those under his authority do likewise. The Samaritans worshipped God; but they were misled by false teachers as to where and how to worship Him. It is likely they refused to assist the Savior because they assumed he rejected them inasmuch as he insisted on going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. In Elijah's case, the issue was opposing worship of a false god. In the case of the Samaritans, the issue was incorrectly worshipping the true God. In addition to the inference of Christ's regard for the Samaritans, one may reasonably infer from the Savior's rebuke that man's dominion over nature is legitimately acted upon with a spirit of fear toward God and respect for His creation, not impetuous behaviors driven by carnal lusts.

Responsibilities of Stewardship

Following God's Directions: Scripture contains many statements that directly, or

else by inference, that address many of the responsibilities of mankind as stewards of creation. Several are contained in the Law of Moses. While we are no longer specifically accountable to the dictates of Mosaic Law service, many of its provisions still have practical application or else have their basis in principles that remain applicable as moral standards for behavior. Consider the Ten Commandment for example. God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel as tenants of Mosaic Law service. However, Christ Jesus satisfied the requirements and purpose of the Law (See Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15). When Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled its provisions thereby delivering the New Testament church from the requirement of practicing Mosaic Law service. However, church doctrine teaches believers to faithfully keep the Ten Commandments in as much as they are valid expressions of godly morality.

In the provisions of Mosaic Law God gave Israel specific instructions about planting and growing crops and breeding and protection of animals with regard to their occupation of Canaan. For instance, as we have already noted, Moses Law instructed Israel to observe a sabbath of rest for the land (Leviticus 25:4). In Leviticus 19, the Lord instructed Israel regarding animal husbandry and crops. “Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed.....” (Leviticus 19:19) He instructed the Israelites to allow trees they planted to grow five years before harvesting their fruit. “And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:23) God also made provisions to protect fruit bearing trees from destruction. “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man’s life) to employ them in the siege: Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.” (Deuteronomy 20:19-20) He even gave Israel instructions about preservation of animals that suggests mankind’s well being is linked to protecting breeding stock. “If a bird’s nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go,

and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

As already noted, the specific directives of these and other tenants of Moses Law no longer bind us. However, close examination reveals underlying principles that still apply as moral expressions of God’s will. One may reasonably draw inferences from the provisions of Law service as to how God wants us to tend His creation. Inferences can also be made from statements in scripture where misuse of nature is employed as an analogy to express displeasure toward Israel’s behavior. Ezekiel used flocks and shepherds as an analogy for Israel and her leaders. He expressed God’s displeasure by likening Israel to flocks that pollute streams and waste grazing land. “And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?” (Ezekiel 34:17-18). The idea presented by Ezekiel is easy to understand: God disapproved of Israel’s behavior and compares it to herds and flocks that pollute streams and ruin grazing land, of which he also disapproves. Although the text is about Israel’s misbehavior, it employs an analogy that indicates God disapproves of misuse of water supplies and grazing land.

Another example of drawing an inference regarding God’s will in regards to nature is the account of the Savior causing an unfruitful fig tree to wither and die. “And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. (Matthew 21:19) Jesus used the occasion to teach what the power of faith can accomplish. However, the reason for Jesus cursing the fig tree is that it was not bearing fruit. Furthermore, in context, we know that Jesus as God’s Christ was acting morally, in keeping with God’s will, when he caused the tree to wither. Therefore, we may reasonably infer from the account that it is acceptable to God for men to remove trees that do not bear fruit. Moreover, there is perhaps a broader inference to be drawn that since the tree was intended to provide food to man and failed to do so, by extension, a plant that fails to serve man’s needs can be removed; with the qualification that the principle purpose for removing the plant gives glory to God.

Liberty of Conscience: Despite these and other texts that give insights as to the responsibilities of mankind to tend to God’s creation, much of what we are to do, and how we do it is unstated. However, lack of detailed instructions does not leave us wholly to our own opinions and devices to carryout the responsibilities of stewardship. In making decisions about how to care for creation, God expects us to

act in good conscience; which means according to His will. He also expects us to make decisions that give him glory. These two principles; making choices according to Gods will; and, making choices that are intended to give glory to God, together form the basis for liberty of conscience.

In Acts 23, the Apostle Paul indicates good citizenship requires living in good conscience toward God by submitting to authority, whether civil, or divine. Speaking as a citizen of Israel and therefore a follower of the Law of Moses and later a follower of Christ who fulfilled the Law, Paul implied he had followed his conscience under godly authority. “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” (Acts 23:1) This statement indicates Paul’s intent was to conform his behavior to appropriate authority, whether under Moses Law or as an Apostle accountable to Christ; and, he thereby had a good conscience toward God. When Paul understood himself to be under the authority of Moses Law, he obeyed it in order to live in all good conscience toward God, who gave the Law to Israel. In similar manner, after he was born again on the Damascus road and Christ Jesus called him as an apostle, Paul diligently obeyed the Savior in order to live in all good conscience toward God. In either case, whether before or after he was born again, Paul lived in good conscience toward God to the extent that he obeyed God’s expression of authority over him; first by keeping Moses Law and then by faith as a follower of Christ Jesus.

Accountability

Scriptural descriptions of Lot, Ananias and Sapphira, King Saul, David and many others indicate God holds us accountable for the choices we make. Furthermore, accountability to God cuts in both directions. He blesses faithful stewardship and chastises and/or punishes disobedience. Scripture clearly presents both sides of a principle of man’s accountability to God. Chastening for disobedience: “But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.” (1 Kings 9:6-9) Blessings for faithfulness: “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give

you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.” (Leviticus 26:3-6)

God specifically holds stewards accountable. This is apparent from both parables told by Jesus and from occasions of accountability found in scripture.

Parables, for the most part, are made up stories designed to address a given situation or occasion. Although the characters and circumstances were fictional, the parables Jesus told always presented God’s view, His moral posture for a given situation. This being so, we can look at parables that depict stewards and understand something of how God can hold us accountable for our stewardship of creation. Luke chapter 16 begins with a parable about an unjust steward. The parable actually addresses how, in order to avoid repenting, the wicked will sometimes manipulate a situation to avoid the consequences of their actions. However, this point is presented in relation to the behaviors of an unfaithful steward. The charge against him was wasting his master’s goods. The consequence of his misbehavior was loss of stewardship. Therefore, the parable also teaches us something of how God holds stewards responsible. Having wasted his master’s good, rather than repenting the unjust steward quickly squandered even more of his master’s goods in an effort to gain favor with the master’s debtors; presuming they would care for his needs. However, Jesus concludes the parable with a warning. “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” (Luke 16:9) The phrase “everlasting habitations” carries a connotation of constant roaming, or of one being perpetually unsettled. Those who seek worldly solutions to escape the consequences of their actions against God’s interests do not escape divine accountability. Rather, they experience the insecurity of lives characterized by an abiding sense of want and fear.

Jesus’ parable of the talents is another lesson that depicts God holding stewards accountable. The object of this parable is to warn the Lord’s people to be vigilante in their care and keeping of His spiritual kingdom on earth, lest He returns and finds us lacking do to fear, neglect or indifference. In the parable, the goods of the man traveling to a far land represents the kingdom. He gives his goods, in the form of talents, to the stewards for safekeeping, with the intent they will use them to the man’s profit. Upon returning he found the first two stewards were faithful to their master’s objective of profit. He praised them and rewarded their efforts by giving

them more authority over his goods. However, the master rebuked the servant who for fear failed to make any profit. He took away the servant's authority and cast him out into darkness.

The Book of Genesis provides an actual account of God holding a steward accountable. God held Adam accountable for disobedience when he failed to properly keep, or protect the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from being used by Satan to entice Eve to eat its fruit. The scope of Adam's disobedience and its impact extends well beyond consequences of failed stewardship. The thing created willfully rebelled in disobedience against the Creator. In his disobedience Adam, and through him all humanity, became something other, and inferior to the man God created. Man was no longer good. However, one cannot ignore the fact that the circumstance of Adam's disobedience was as God's steward who failed in his duty to care for and keep the garden. Perhaps this is why God included a curse upon the earth as one of the consequences of Adam's sin.

A particularly distinct judgment of God against disobedient stewards occurred during Israel's Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah the prophet foretold a desolation of the land that would last seventy years. "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jeremiah 25:11) In 2 Chronicle 36:21 we learn the desolation was for seventy sabbaths of rest for the land "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." In disobedience to the Law God gave to Moses, Israel had for almost five hundred years, failed to keep the sabbath of rest for the land. Therefore, in judging Israel for this and other transgressions, part of God's judgment was to allow the land to rest for seventy years. God held Israel accountable as stewards of His creation for their disobedience and in consequence, a whole generation never enjoyed the rich harvests Canaan's fertile land typically produced. (It is interesting, and gives pause, to consider that God's judgment fell upon that present generation even though seventy prior generations of Israelites bore the greater weight of irresponsibility for exploiting the land by ignoring the sabbath of rest.)

Accountability does not always mean chastisement for disobedience. God also counts faithful stewardship with blessings. This is apparent from the parable of the talents. The master rewarded the stewards to whom he had given two and five talents for their diligence and skill in improving the his holdings. Abraham received a blessing from God after in good conscience he allowed Lot to choose whatever grazing land he preferred. Moreover, God blest Jacob's stewardship in raising flocks and herds first for his father-in-law, Laban, and then for himself.

Conclusion

One desire I had in writing this essay is to stimulate interest in the topic of stewardship of creation. Whether or not this effort stimulates your own study, please keep in mind God as Creator made all things, including nature with all its resources. Furthermore, even after man's fall God retains ownership of His creation. He also, through many examples in scripture and by providential care, has indicated He values His creation, both as a way to demonstrate His glory and for its usefulness. As God's stewards, consider the responsibilities we have to care for and keep creation. God, who is the head of all things, made us middle managers when He gave man dominion over nature. Principles revealed by Mosaic Law and other scriptural references provide instructions and guidelines about how He expects us to use and care for creation. Consider the principles of living in good conscience toward God by submitting to His authority and seeking to give Him glory by our choices; and how we all can exercise liberty of conscience in making the many decisions that go into being faithful stewards of God's creation. Moreover, remember God holds us accountable for our stewardship; that He blesses faithful stewards and chastises those who disobey Him. May we keep these things in mind when deciding how we will use God's creation.

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