

# What Does the Bible Say about . . . ?

November 4, 2009

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## . . . Afterlife for Animals?

### I. Announcements

- A. Open with prayer
- B. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions helpful for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying)
- C. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
- D. 90 minutes on 1st Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
- E. Need volunteers to read passages listed in **bold**.
- F. Does anyone have any questions/topics for us to consider for next time?

### II. Introduction and Review

- A. Last session we talked about how we can grow in our love for God and how we can express it.
  1. We looked at some passages of Scripture to help us and we also used insights from what we know about love among people.
  2. **What are some of the things we found out when we talked about applying these insights to our love for God?**
- B. On the surface, all of our Bible studies seem to have been about learning the Bible better, but it goes deeper than that.
  1. The Bible, after all, is just a book. It's an important one and an influential one, but really, it's only words on paper.
  2. It's importance and its value is not in itself, but in the fact that it can lead us into a relationship with God.
  3. That is what our studies have all been about. We study the Bible to begin or to deepen our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
  4. The more and better we know God, the closer our relationship can be, the deeper our love can grow, and the more complete we will be as human beings, the sons and daughters of the God of all creation.
- C. Today we're going to look at a question that, again on the surface, may not seem to be certainly the most vital one to ask.
  1. But answering it will help us to broaden and deepen our understanding of God. And that is our goal.
  2. Our question: Is there an afterlife for animals too?

### III. Janet and I have a cat that is in the last days or weeks of her life. And just over a week ago some friends of ours had to euthanize their dog.

- A. Everyone who has a pet that we have talked with has felt the same kind of distress that we and our friends are experiencing.
  1. When people die, we are comforted by knowing the mercy of God and the salvation of Jesus Christ.
  2. But what about when our pets die? What about the deaths of animals we can love almost as much as we love our children?

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3. Life is not a cartoon like “All Dogs Go to Heaven.” We’re looking for real answers. What does the Bible say? What does God say? Do our pets have a place in heaven?

B. There are some who say there is no essential difference between people and animals. It’s a view shared by many animal-rights activists, for example.

1. **How does this fit with the Christian worldview, based upon the revelation in Scripture? Can you think of any passages in the Bible that throw light on this? (Genesis 1:26-28 “in the image of God”)**
2. **Well, if we were made in the image of God and animals were not, what is the difference? (Tool-making? intellect? music? language? Or soul?)**
3. For many, many Christians, the answer to that can be found in a widely held interpretation of **Genesis 2:7**.
4. There is a word here, the Hebrew word *neshemah*<sup>1</sup> (נֶשֶׁמָה) translated “breath” or “breath of life.” This word can also mean “spirit.” In other passages it is translated that way.<sup>2</sup>
5. This breath is given to Adam, but it does not say here that it was given to the animals. **What kind of conclusions do you think could be drawn from that?**
6. The context certainly seems to support the view that Genesis 2:7 is saying human beings have souls and animals do not.

C. Well that’s the end of our study for today, then right? Not exactly. This is a case where we need to look a bit further, to consider a broader context.

1. We find our word *neshemah* again in Genesis 7:22. This was the time of the great flood in the days of Noah.
  - a) Let’s read **Genesis 7:21-23** and look for our word “breath” or “breath of life” in v. 22.
  - b) **So who had the *neshemah*?** (birds, cattle, beasts, humankind)
2. **So now what can we conclude? Does this prove animals have souls?** (Don’t push too hard on the meaning. We don’t want to make too much out of a single word. That approach leads to all kinds of errors. All this use of *neshemah* here really shows is that the breath of life is in both human beings and animals.)

D. To be fair to those who try to make a point about God breathing a soul into people, there also is another word that is used a lot in the Bible for breath or spirit: *ruah*<sup>3</sup> (רוּחַ)

1. However, *ruah* doesn’t appear in the accounts of the creation. And it too is used elsewhere in an interesting way.
2. **Psalm 104:30 Do you see the word (in its English translation)? To whom does it apply? (God’s spirit/breath.)**

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<sup>1</sup> Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, number H5397

<sup>2</sup> Job 26:4 ; Proverbs 20:27

<sup>3</sup> Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, number H7307

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3. Now look at the previous verse: **Psalm 104:29**. Do you see it again? To whom does it apply there? (spirit/breath of the animals)
4. The same word is applied to both God and to animals. So can we draw any new conclusions here? (remember it can be spirit or breath)
5. At this point then what do we know for sure about whether animals do or do not have souls of some kind? (Not much. They have life and it comes from God just as ours does.)

E. The fact is that there is no passage in all of the Bible that definitively says whether animals do or do not have souls or whether they will or will not be resurrected after death.

1. Why do you think that is? Why would a question that we see as so important—or at least interesting—be left unanswered in the Bible?
2. Think about it this way: what is the purpose of the Bible?
3. The Bible is not an encyclopedia to answer every question we have about everything. It has a purpose—to reveal God to us—and it is focused on that purpose.
4. It is not designed to tell us the nature of animals.

IV. We are going to have to approach this question, then, from a different perspective. It is not a particular passage of Scripture that we need to carefully understand, but the nature and character of God.

A. We are familiar with many passages that tell us about God in relationship to us, but what about God in relationship to the rest of creation, and especially for our study today, to the animals in that creation?

1. We know the Bible's teaching that God created all living creatures, but what about after that? In Psalm 50 God is telling the people their animal sacrifices are useless. Then God makes an important point for us in **Psalm 50:10-11** (all the animals are mine)
2. What does this tell us? What kind of relationship does it imply?

B. There are other passages, albeit poetic ones, that speak of animals offering their praise to God.

1. **Psalm 96:11-12; Psalm 148:9-10**
2. How do animals praise God? Do you think they know and understand they are doing so?
3. Perhaps it's like **Psalm 19:1-4** (heavens proclaim the glory of God)
4. How do the heavens praise God? Is there a way in which animals can do the same? (i.e., something about them reveals something about God, their Creator.)
5. What does this reveal to us about the relationship between God and animals?

C. Let's read a few more representative passages, and as we do, think about what else each tells us about God's relationship with the animals.

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1. **Jonah 4:9-11** Does anything strike you as surprising or unexpected in this statement? (God has compassion on the people of Nineveh “and also many animals.” (cattle, NIV)
2. **Deut. 25:4** Don’t muzzle an ox that is threshing. Why would there be a rule like that? (Don’t keep it from eating some of the crop while it is doing all the work! The ox deserves a share of the profits!)
3. **Exodus 20:8-10; (23:12)** day of rest for ox or donkey too. Is there anything especially significant about this passage? (4<sup>th</sup> of the 10 Commandments) How many times do we hear or read the 10 Commandments and not even stop to marvel that God includes the animals! What does including this in the 10 Commandments tell us? What does it tell us about God?
4. Jesus has something to say about this too. Look at **Luke 12:6** (Sparrows not forgotten by God.) What does this say about God’s concern for the sparrows compared to our human concern?
5. So after reading and thinking about these passages what can we observe about the way God thinks or feels about the animals of the world? And what does this show us about the character of God?

D. If we watch enough nature shows on PBS we are certainly made aware of the food chain or the interdependency of plants and animals and the eco-system. The Bible describes it another way, as God’s provision for all, including the animals.

1. **Psalms 104:10-30** (God’s role in providing for animals, creating them.) What do you see here? What does this tell us about God and God’s provision for the animal kingdom? This is a great overview and one of my new favorite passages talking about God’s provision for animals.
2. (Notice: They die when God takes his spirit/breath [*ruah*] from them.)
3. In the New Testament, Jesus reiterates the point. **Matthew 6:26** (God cares for the birds of the air.)
4. **Luke 12:24** (The ravens are fed by God.)
5. Compare then what God does for animals and what we human beings do for animals. What are some similarities and some differences?
6. What does God’s provision for animals tell us about who God is?

V. We’ve seen a lot, but we still have to wonder, do animals have a soul and do they have an eternal future?

A. It seems that their lot is somehow tied up with ours, for better or for worse.

1. We both experience death, obviously, but is there a difference in our deaths? **Ecclesiastes 3:18-22** (Man and beast both alike perish and return to dust. Breath of man goes up and of beast goes down.)
2. Take a careful look at this. On the first reading what does that sound like for the animals? But consider this whole book; can someone sum up the attitude of the author, i.e., the “preacher,” at least up until the last few lines? (This is the “preacher’s” cynical evaluation. “All is vanity.” So this observation is part of his cynical outlook.)

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3. **Genesis 6:7, 17** What is the connection here between us and animals?

(Animals suffer the same curse as people. All to be blotted out in Noahic Flood.) **Why?** (They have been corrupted too by humanity's sin)

4. **Genesis 6:19-20** What's our connection here? (Animals rescued, just as humans were.)

5. **Genesis 9:8-11** Here we find an example of the most astounding connection of all. **Do you see it?** (God's covenant with Noah "and with every living creature." specifically mentions all the kinds of animals.

B. Animals are tied to us in suffering the punishment and corruption of our sin, in God's rescue of us and them from that, and even in God's covenant promises.

1. And there is a hint of something more.

2. **Luke 8:30-33.** (swine and demoniac) **What do we see about the nature of animals here? If they can be possessed, what does that imply?** (capable of having a spirit of some sort)

VI. Still, there really is nothing in Scripture that tells us about what happens to *individual* animals after they die. But that does not mean we will enter an eternity with only us and God.

A. Isaiah gives us our first glimpse in **Isaiah 11:6-9** (wolves and lamb, lion and calf)

1. This is a poetic passage, so symbolism always has to be considered. (Predator and prey together could symbolize peace, but still animals are chosen to be the picture for us.)

2. **But how does this strike you? What does it mean? What does it mean about animals? And what does it reveal to us about God?**

B. We often think of God's plan of salvation for us, but that's not the whole story.

1. **Ephesians 1:3-4, 8b-10** (God's plan to bring all things together under Christ) **What is God's goal? And what does that tell us about who God is? Does that shed some light on our question?**

2. **Romans 8:18-22** (creation itself will be set free . . . into the glory of God)

3. And finally we are given an ecstatic view of heaven in the vision that was given to John. **Revelation 5:11-13** **What do you notice in verse 13?**

C. The Bible is very, very sincere when it says "God loved **the world so much** that God gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him **will not perish**, but have everlasting life.

1. God's love is profoundly, immeasurably immense.

2. In Ephesians we are prayed for that we can begin to understand how high and wide and deep and long is the love of God.

3. And Jesus tells us that whatever we do for the *least*, the most insignificant person that he receives it as if it were done directly to him.

4. Sometimes familiar words just roll past us, and it takes a new approach for us to understand them again—or for the first time.

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5. Is there an afterlife for animals? Will we see our beloved pets again? The Bible doesn't give us a full answer to that. But it does tell us a lot about the God who created them and us, who cares and provides for them and us, who cares even about the sparrows—and us, who has done everything imaginable and beyond our imagination in order to save and restore us and all of God's creation, even the very least.
6. When we know that God, I think we know the answer.

## VII. Summary

- A. Have we answered today's questions satisfactorily? Are there still questions on this topic we need to discuss more? What questions for next time?
- B. Next meeting: **Wednesday, December 2, 2009. 7:00 p.m.**
- C. Closing prayer
- D. Archives of class notes can be found online at:  
[www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa](http://www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa)

## Additional reading:

Job 39-41. Descriptions of animals, their abilities, and lesson that God made them all.

Jeremiah 7:20 – all (animals too) “punished” to purify

Exodus 21:28-32 Ox that kills shall be killed

Psalm 36:6 God preserves people and animals

Proverbs 12:10 righteous have regard for the life of an animal

<http://www.frontline.org.za/articles/animals.htm>