

# Q 8.4 Is Creation Care Relevant to the Gospel Message?

Absolutely! Creation care is not only relevant to but is inseparable from the gospel message. The gospel is good news for all creation – not just humans. It is the promise of a permanent worldwide return to the very good kingdom way of peace that God established in the beginning, where all embody His loving image and likeness in their stewardship over creation.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction

Original Hebrew Meaning of Gospel

Greek Meaning of Gospel

The Good News of Restoration Through Jesus

The Promise of the Gospel

A Return to the Beginning

Creation Care is Inseparable from the Gospel

## **Introduction**

The creation care component of the gospel message is often overlooked. As a result, people tend to have an incomplete understanding of the good news. If we carefully piece together all that is said about the good news in Scripture, the connection between creation care and the gospel should become clear.

## **Original Hebrew Meaning of Gospel**

The Hebrew word for ‘gospel’ is בָּשָׂר (basar), meaning ‘good news’. It is associated with a messenger who would eagerly run, usually on foot, to deliver good news. It would typically be delivered to a king: “*Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, ‘Please let me run and tell the king the good news that the LORD has*

*avenged him of his enemies.”* (2 Samuel 18:19, BSB). The feet of this messenger of good news are described as beautiful: *“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”* (Isaiah 52:7, BSB). Paul quotes this passage when likening such messengers to those who are sent by God to preach the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ: *“And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”* (Romans 10:15, NIV). When describing the armor of God, Paul says to prepare yourself as such a messenger for preaching the gospel: *“and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace”* (Ephesians 6:15, NASB). Isaiah prophesied that a messiah would one day come and preach good news not to a king but to the poor, *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners”* (Isaiah 61:1, BSB). Jesus later declared that He is the messiah spoken of by Isaiah, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* (Luke 4:21, BSB).<sup>1</sup>

## **Greek Meaning of Gospel**

The two Greek words for ‘gospel’ are εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*) and εὐαγγέλιον (*euaggelion*), each meaning ‘good news’ or ‘to share good news’. In nearly every instance, they refer to the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. The gospel is for everyone,<sup>2</sup> and it is everlasting<sup>3</sup> good news of peace, *“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through*

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<sup>1</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18, BSB, referencing Isaiah 61:1).

<sup>2</sup> “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15, NKJV).

<sup>3</sup> “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6, NKJV).

*Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all*" (Acts 10:36, NIV). Through Jesus our Lord, all the right relationships that were established by God in the beginning and declared very good<sup>4</sup> are reconciled<sup>5</sup> and restored: *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, BSB). Humanity's relationship with God is being restored to one of faithfulness, trust, and obedience.<sup>6</sup> Human relationships are being restored from one of strife<sup>7</sup> to that of brotherly love, *"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Galatians 5:14, ESV).<sup>8</sup> And our relationship to all of creation is being restored to that of dominion<sup>9</sup> in God's image<sup>10</sup> and character: *"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them"* (1 John 4:16, NIV).

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<sup>4</sup> "And God looked upon all that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31, BSB).

<sup>5</sup> "For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19-20, BSB).

<sup>6</sup> "If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love" (John 15:10, BSB); "The LORD watches over those who obey him, those who trust in his constant love" (Psalm 33:18, GNT).

<sup>7</sup> "Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'" (Genesis 4:8-9, NKJV).

<sup>8</sup> "And we have this commandment from Him: Whoever loves God must love his brother as well" (1 John 4:21, BSB); "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, BSB).

<sup>9</sup> "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26, NKJV); "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" (Isaiah 11:6, NIV).

<sup>10</sup> "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4, NIV).

## The Good News of Restoration Through Jesus

The need for this good news began when Adam and Eve were unfaithful to God by trusting in Satan's lie instead of in God's truth, *"You will not surely die," the serpent told her* (Genesis 3:4, BSB).<sup>11</sup> This original act of unfaithfulness and its corresponding disobedience destroyed all these right relationships while also bringing sin and death into the world: *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death was passed on to all men, because all sinned"* (Romans 5:12, BSB). Sin causes death.<sup>12</sup> Through Jesus, we are saved<sup>13</sup> from sin, *"She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21, BSB). Through His sinless life of obedience to God<sup>14</sup> and His resurrection from the dead,<sup>15</sup> God has established the way for reversing the death and

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<sup>11</sup> "And the LORD God commanded him, 'You may eat freely from every tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.'" (Genesis 2:16-17, BSB).

<sup>12</sup> "but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10, NIV); "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26, BSB).

<sup>13</sup> "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16, NIV); "And in Him, having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13, BSB); "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2, NIV).

<sup>14</sup> "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19, BSB); "But you know that Christ appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5, BSB); "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22, BSB); "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15, BSB).

<sup>15</sup> "Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach" (2 Timothy 2:8, NLT); "And now we proclaim to you the good news: What God promised our fathers He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (Acts 13:32-33, BSB).

destruction caused by the lies<sup>16</sup> of the adversary, *“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8, ESV). Jesus is the truth that dispels the lies, *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”* (John 14:6, NKJV). As theologian Andrew Linzey puts it, *“The story of the Fall is inextricably related to the story of redemption; the one is impossible without the other.”*<sup>17</sup>

### **The Promise of the Gospel**

The promise of the gospel is that Jesus will soon return<sup>18</sup> to put an end to all the kingdoms of the world, *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever”* (Daniel 2:44, NIV). In their place, He will establish His unending peaceable<sup>19</sup> kingdom, *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in*

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<sup>16</sup> “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44, NIV).

<sup>17</sup> Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12, NKJV).

<sup>19</sup> “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NKJV); “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17, NIV); “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 sea is full of water” (Isaiah 11:9, BSB).

heaven” (Matthew 6:10, BSB). At that time He will resurrect<sup>20</sup> to eternal life<sup>21</sup> in His kingdom all who have turned away from<sup>22</sup> their unfaithfulness<sup>23</sup> and disobedience<sup>24</sup> to God, *“Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment”* (John 5:28-29, BSB). This is an undeserved gift of grace from God, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23, NIV). It is granted to those who separate themselves

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<sup>20</sup> “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.’” (John 11:25, NKJV); “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:13-14, BSB). See also: Revelation 20:11-15.

<sup>21</sup> “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4, NKJV).

<sup>22</sup> “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you used to walk when you conformed to the ways of this world” (Ephesians 2:1-2, BSB); “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 2:13, NIV); “For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Peter 4:6, NKJV); “We are bringing you good news that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them” (Acts 14:15, BSB).

<sup>23</sup> “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7, NKJV); “The one who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; and the one who is unrighteous in a very little thing is also unrighteous in much” (Luke 16:10, NASB).

<sup>24</sup> “Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:6, ESV); “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thessalonians 1:8, NIV); “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17, NKJV); “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, BSB).

from the ways of the world<sup>25</sup> and believe<sup>26</sup> in the promised restoration of God's very good kingdom: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16, NKJV). Jesus put it simply, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:15, CSB).

### **A Return to the Beginning**

The gospel is often framed entirely as the resurrection of Jesus and the invitation to eternal life with Him. While this framing highlights two significant aspects of the gospel, it fails to appreciate the reversal of the original sin that brought death into the world. It likewise overlooks the connection between the promised kingdom of God and God's original very good design for creation. It similarly fails to appreciate eternal life with God as being a return to immortality as it was in the beginning before sin and death entered the world. These aspects of the gospel dealing with reconciliation and restoration strongly suggest a return to the beginning as God's children: *"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed"* (Romans 8:19, NIV). This means the gospel is good news not just for humans but for all creation – and it is real! As author Geoffrey Rudd puts it, *"Not a far-fetched vision but a state of affairs which could be attained by the application of love and kindness. We all know of examples of cats and dogs, foxes and squirrels and many other animals living together in complete harmony under the guardianship of animal lovers. There is no reason*

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<sup>25</sup> "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8, NKJV); "I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive any of her plagues'" (Revelation 18:4, NKJV); "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

<sup>26</sup> "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2, NKJV).

*why, as our understanding of the purpose of life deepens and our sense of moral responsibility expands, Isaiah's vision will not come true.”*<sup>27</sup>

### **Creation Care is Inseparable from the Gospel**

In the beginning God designed humanity to be keepers and preservers of the entire created world: *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it”* (Genesis 2:15, NKJV). In order to maintain the established peace and immortality of all creatures, God designed and instructed every creature to subsist on an entirely plant-based diet, *“Then God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit contains seed. They will be yours for food. And to every beast of the earth and every bird of the air and every creature that crawls upon the earth—everything that has the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so”* (Genesis 1:29-30, BSB). God is the keeper and preserver of all of His created beings: *“Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people and animals”* (Psalm 36:6, NIV). And in His kingdom humans were created in His image<sup>28</sup> to carry out this task of preserving each other and the animals, *“The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel”* (Proverbs 12:10, NIV). Creation care was thus our divinely ordained role from the beginning, and the gospel is the good news of a return to the beginning. Therefore creation care is inseparable from the gospel. It is an indispensable way of demonstrating faith in the wisdom of the gospel as we prepare ourselves and the world for the return of our Lord Jesus and the permanent establishment of His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven: *“And the*

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<sup>27</sup> Rudd, Geoffrey L. *Why Kill for Food?* Wilmslow, Cheshire: The Vegetarian Society, 1956, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> Our heavenly DNA is our Christlike character reflecting the image of God: *“And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man”* (1 Corinthians 15:49, NKJV).

*Lord answered, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their portion at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.'*" (Luke 12:42-43, BSB).