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Šabbath (שַׁבָּת) in Leviticus 25:2-5 as a Response to Environmental Degradation in Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Environmental deterioration has taken a long time to become a global concern since it was first articulated as a scientific problem. Environmental degradation was formerly considered an abstract idea, but it is now far from abstract, defining people's lives. Thrilling weather events and increased variability in weather patterns have severe consequences for societies that rely on Land, lakes, and seas for food and income. Due to insufficient knowledge, citizens' responses to environmental deterioration have been limited by a fundamental lack of relevant, helpful information for Northern residents. In the north, the civilized world's heavy media coverage and public awareness campaigns have been lacking, particularly outside major urban areas. The extent to which Nigerians comprehend environmental degradation will determine how they respond. Unfortunately, little is known about how Northerners perceive and comprehend environmental degradation today. By utilizing the Biblical wisdom revealed in Leviticus 25:1-5, this article aimed to be a voice and source of knowledge for the targeted audience. The study used the lessons learned from the literature to help Northern Nigeria address its existential dilemma. A diachronic approach to the text is used, with the historical-grammatical method fully complemented.*

KEYWORDS: Šabbath (שַׁבָּת), Leviticus 25:2-5, environmental degradation, Northern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation is currently one of the most important global political and economic agenda issues, while it has taken a long time to become an international concern because it was initially communicated as a scientific problem.[1] It was initially considered an abstract concept, but now, environmental degradation is far from the abstract - it clearly defines people's lives. Extreme weather events and greater volatility in weather patterns have severe penalties for the society that

[1]BBC World Service Trust, Research Report Nigeria, "Nigeria Talks Climate: The Public Understanding on Climate Change." 06-Nigeria-Talks-Climate-pdf. Assessed on February 4th, 2022.

depends on Land, lakes, and seas for feeding and earning a living. Lack of proper knowledge has hampered citizens' response to environmental degradation by a fundamental shortage of relevant, helpful information, especially for northern inhabitants. The intensive media coverage and public consciousness campaigns in the civilized world have been largely absent in northern Nigeria, particularly outside major urban areas.[2] Nigeria's response to environmental degradation will be dictated by how well its people understand it. Unfortunately, little is known about how northerners perceive and understand environmental degradation.

Unmistakable evidence exists that the environment is becoming more dangerous due to climate change, endangering most countries' natural and socio-economic security. It has been usual to experience dry spells, flooding, off-season precipitation, and droughts. A few consequences of environmental deterioration in Nigeria, particularly in the north, include heat stress, a lack of harmattan, erratic rainfall patterns, higher rains, gully erosion, flooding, and landslides. These disasters have impacted, among other things, farmland, water and forest resources, settlement infrastructure, and soil fertility.

Environmental degradation presents additional stress for Northern Nigeria, which is already struggling with the challenges posed by climate variability, insecurity, and widespread poverty. The agricultural sector contributes 40% of the majority source of income of the region, and her rural populace is employed in this sector.[3] The dominant role of agriculture makes it evident that even minor climate deteriorations can cause devastating socio-economic consequences. The country's politics and public discussions are barely addressing the mentioned problems. The last few years appear to have been so dominated by the internal questions of power that specific problems like environmental degradation would not have garnered real consideration outside the circle of environment specialists or NGOs.

There is also increasing evidence that Land will be particularly hit by the effect of vertical rises and falls in the temperature of air currents. Environmental degradation often appears significantly unobservable, but in Northern Nigeria, signs are observed. The region already faces an increasing disease incidence, declining agricultural productivity, and rising heat waves. There is glaring evidence that environmental degradation is not only happening but also changing inhabitants' lives. Deteriorating rainfall in already desert-prone areas in northern Nigeria is causing increasing desertification. Apart from an apparent lack of coherent response from Nigeria's government at all levels, there is also an evident lack of adequate consideration of this growing threat by the Nigerian church. Such a consideration should begin with biblical environmental care and management paradigms. God, who is Omniscient, provided the answer required to explore from Leviticus 25:1–

[2]Ibid.

[3]Tolulope Odetola and Chinonso Etumnu, "Contribution of Agriculture to Economic Growth in Nigeria." Conference: The 18th Annual Conference of the African Econometric Society, Accra, Ghana, July 2013

5, which is the central focus of this paper. Although many publications and research are conducted to solve the issue of environmental degradation in northern Nigeria, the majority did not consider the principles that God, who created the entire universe, enshrined in the book under consideration. Therefore, through a diachronic approach to the text, and fully complemented with the historical-grammatical method, this research aims to fill this gap by unveiling the hidden secret provided by the Creator of all things.

An Overview of Environmental Degradation

Everything that makes up people's surroundings and influences their capacity to live on earth is called the environment. According to Ernst Conradie, the environment encompasses buildings, furniture, automobiles, cell phones, papers, advertisements, plastics, rubbish, plants, animals, soil, water, mountains, rivers, and clouds.[4] He further claims that environmental issues in Africa and around the world threaten both rural and urban societies' ability to sustain themselves and the existence of all of God's creations. Loss of biodiversity, climate change, deforestation, desertification, overfishing, contamination of water supplies, rapid population increase, soil erosion, municipal waste management, and worsening water shortages are just a few of the problems that need to be addressed.[5] Similar worries are shared by Nihinlola, who sees environmental degradation as a severe global issue affecting many things like pollution, biodiversity loss, animal extinction, deforestation and desertification, global warming, etc.[6]

Depletion of resources causes environmental degradation, which affects all biotic and abiotic components of the environment around humans, including the air, water, soil, plants, animals, and all other living and non-living aspects of the planet. Malcolm and Pitelka assert that environmental degradation is a reality rather than a myth.[7] Similarly, Ken Gnanakan thinks the environmental crisis raises concerns about resource depletion and that the poor are disproportionately impacted by food and water shortages. Therefore, he considers population growth as one factor that poses a threat to the ecological and overall stability of the planet.[8]

[4] Ernst Conradie, "The Environment," *African Public Theology,* Edited by Sunday Bobai Agang (Jos: ACTS, & Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Publishing), 158.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Emiola Nihinlola, *Theology Under the Mango Tree: A Handbook of African Christian Theology* (Ogbomoso: NBTS, Publishing Unit, 2018), 116.

[7] J.R Malcolm,.andL. Pitelka, "Ecosystems & Global Climate Change: A Review of Potential Impacts on US Terrestrial Ecosystems and Biodiversity." (Arlington: Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 2000).

[8] Ken Gnanakan, "Environmental Issues Facing Africa." *Theology of Creation and Environment* (ICHE series). Edited by AdetoyeFaniran (Ogbomoso: Hitise Celebrity Publishers, 2019), 153.

According to Gnanakan, most people—up to 95% in some nations—rely on agriculture and other resource-based activities directly for their living. The rest of the population is utterly dependent on these resources for food, fuel, industrial production, and recreation. Most of the world's natural resources are badly exhausted, particularly in Nigeria. Agricultural fertilizer and chemical usage are vital contributors to soil deterioration, soil erosion, salinity, general loss of agricultural land fertility, and high-quality crop yield. Groundwater aquifers have been drained, surface water supplies have been severely polluted, and water for drinking and agriculture has become increasingly scarce and unclean in many arid and semi-arid regions. Air quality is deteriorating, and fishery yields are declining. Increased air, water, and land pollution threaten human health and longevity.

Environmental degradation impacts some types of development programs in most nations. Development organizations must consider the environmental and climatic hazards that their programs confront if they are to contribute to reducing poverty in the communities in which they operate. The environment's rapid decline is impacting numerous individuals in developing nations.[9] Some scholars, including O'Neill et al., attribute environmental degradation to overpopulation; they contend that if that population is decreased, environmental degradation will eventually stop. They believe a slower population growth rate might provide 16 to 29% of the emissions reductions required by 2050 to avert dangerous climate change. By 2050, decreasing population growth might prevent 1.4 to 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon emissions annually, according to their studies in 35 countries, assisting in the fight against global warming.[10]

A variety of factors cause environmental deterioration. Maurya et al. categorize it into two; human (modern urbanization, industrialization, overpopulation, deforestation, etc.) and natural (flood, typhoons, droughts, rising temperatures, fires, etc.) causes.[11] Environmental contamination, which he defines as the reduction in the quantity and quality of natural resources, is a significant concern for Nihinlola.[12] Many different human activities are the leading causes of environmental degradation. According to Olorode et al., the automobile industry increases the number of dangerous greenhouse gases, including SOx, NOx, CO, and environmental emissions.[13]

[9]Nihinlola, *Theology Under the Mango Tree: A Handbook of African Christian Theology,* 115.

[10] B.C. O'neill, M. Dalton, R. Fuchs, L. Jiang, S. Pachauri, and K. Zigova, "Global demographic trends and future carbon emissions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,* 107, 41 (217): 17521-17526.

[11]Pradip Kumar Maurya, et al. "An introduction to environmental degradation: Causes, consequence and Mitigation," In *Environmental Degradation: Cause and Remediation Strategies,* DOI: 10.26832/aesa-2020-edcrs-01.

[12]Nihinlola, 116-118.

[13] O.A. Olorode, E.A. Bamigbola, and O.M. Ogba, "Comparative Studies of some River Waters in Port Harcourt based on Their Physico-Chemical and Microbiological analysis, Niger Delta Region of Nigeria." *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science,* 3 (2015): 29-37.

Unintentional industry and urbanization have contaminated the earth, water, air, and sounds. Olorode et al. claim that sewage waste, urbanization, and industrialization all contribute to the degradation of water sources.[14] Similar to how factories and cars affect the air, vehicles release pollutants like nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and other dust particles. Since using tools and the gradual development of communities, man has played a crucial part in the evolution of the natural environment.[15]

Northern Nigeria and Environmental Degradation

With a total area of 923,768 square kilometers and a population of over 215 million, Nigeria is one of the biggest countries in Africa. It also contains the most incredible range of cultures, ways of life, cities, and topography (356,668 square miles). Its Gulf of Guinea coastline is 774 kilometers long (480 mi.). Nigeria borders Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and Niger on its 4,470-kilometer (2513-mile) length. Until 1989, Lagos served as the country's capital; however, Abuja is now the capital city.[16]

Nigeria is home to numerous native African races, leading to a diverse population and culture. In Nigeria, Bantu and Semi-Bantu immigrants from central and southern Africa coexisted with Sudanese. Later, more peoples from the far north, including the Shuwa-Arabs, Tuaregs, and Fulanis, entered northern Nigeria through the Sahara Desert. In Nigeria, there are more than 250 ethnic groups, and no one group has a numerical majority. Three influential groups, the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east, comprise 60% of the population. Tiv and Jukun, as well as the Kanuri, Binis, Ibibio, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Efik, and Nupe communities.[17]

Nigeria's northern region comprises the Northeast, North-West, and North-Central (Middle Belt) geopolitical zones. Almu et al. claim that northern Nigeria, which makes up more than 70% of the nation's landmass, is the country's largest region. Earlier than British colonialism, the area had its administrative structure. She is a well-known tourist destination with distinctive traditional cuisine and abundant natural resources. Northern Nigeria is also a vital agricultural area.[18] Because most of the population lacks formal or Western education, this region suffers educational issues.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Maurya, et al. "An Introduction To Environmental Degradation: Causes, Consequence And Mitigation," In *Environmental Degradation: Cause and Remediation Strategies,* DOI: 10.26832/aesa-2020-edcrs-01.

[16] "History & People – Nigerian Embassy Berlin." https://nigeriaembassygermany.org/history-and-people.htm. March 14th, 2022.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Bello Almu, Miracle Adesina, and Kahinde Kazeem Kanmodi, "Norther Nigeria: An Overview," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327915628_Northern_Nigeria_An_overview. Accessed on March 6th, 2022.

Conflicts based on religion, terrorism, especially by the "Boko Haram" group, extreme poverty, a lack of access to top-notch medical facilities and qualified practitioners, and the political climate in northern Nigeria are all sources of insecurity. Inter-tribal conflicts are also frequent, especially among farmers and nomadically herding cattle.[19]

Challenge of Environmental Degradation in Northern Nigeria

The stress that northern Nigeria already faces from dealing with climate change, insecurity, and pervasive poverty are increased by environmental deterioration. The significant number of the rural population in the area is employed in the agricultural industry, which also contributes significantly to the region's principal source of income. Due to the importance of agriculture, even slight climate changes can potentially bring catastrophic socio-economic collapse.[20]

Additionally, there is growing evidence that the impact of increases in the vertical air current and falls will be particularly severe on Land. Although it may sound esoteric, environmental deterioration is actual in northern Nigeria. Diseases are spreading throughout the area, agricultural output is declining, and heat waves are happening more frequently. There is no shortage of proof that locals' quality of life is being impacted by environmental degradation. In already desert-prone areas of northern Nigeria, declining rainfall contributes to increased desertification. The last food basket for Central Nigeria is now empty.[21]

The Socio-Economic Challenge: Some food and cultural practices, a component of indigenous cultural heritage's sacred groves, have changed due to habitat degradation and reserve potential.[22] Abang categorized the socio-economic distribution of the country using the design of the industrial environment.[23] Cities with textile industries, including Kano, Kaduna, and Jos, lack access to transportation and the entry of foreign goods, in contrast to coastal cities, such as Ibadan, Ilorin, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Benin, and Sapele. Due to a lack of indigenous technology, they act as bases for foreign facilities that have been abandoned in their native countries but are found in these states. The environmental effects of these outdated technologies have led to severe environmental degradation, including increased air and water pollution, loss of aquatic life, destruction of arable farmland, gas flaring, and susceptibility of coastal communities to endemic diseases like malaria.[24]

[19]Ibid.

[20] BBC World Service Trust, Research Report Nigeria, "Nigeria Talks Climate: The Public Understanding on Climate Change." 06-Nigeria-Talks-Climate-pdf. Assessed on February 4th, 2022.

[21]Ibid.

[22] A. C. Ibe, "A Study Of Petroleum Related Pollution In Nigeria." *IOC-UNESCO* 1986, 16. Assessed February 23rd, 2022.

[23]S.O Abang, "The Nigerian Ecosystem Under Threat, in Nigeria Environment," *Nigerian Conservation Foundation.(*Lagos: Macmillan (Nig) Publisher Ltd., 1995), 167-182.

[24] Ibid.

The area of the nation's already modest beaches might be drastically reduced by sea level rise, flooding, and erosion, endangering the value of recreational facilities like hotels and other social facilities with a reputation for tourism. Ibe stated that transportation would suffer, and the sea's influx would disrupt the buying and selling of services due to rising sea levels.[25] These companies' operations and output will suffer as a result of the decrease in the availability of fishing resources and the destruction of forests brought on by environmental degradation. Wind and rainstorm damage in Nigeria between 1992 and 2007 was estimated at $720 million in commercially manufactured products.[26] Accordingly, resource degradation brought on by climate change would slow economic expansion and push the unemployment rate to 19% in 2009.[27] The coastal industrialization movement has significantly increased unemployment and caused between 27 and 33 million Nigerians to live in poverty, affecting peoples' ways of life.[28] As a result, there is more crime, crowding, ghettoization, and inner-city decay. The cost of climate change on Nigeria's economy by 2050 will range from 6 to 30 percent of its GDP, or $100 to $460 billion.[29]

The Challenge to Health

Climate change and ozone depletion impact the physiology of aquatic animals and plants when the environment warms because they may not be able to withstand heat stress, harming their nutrition and making them susceptible to nutritional illnesses.[30] Due to global warming, skin conditions like sunburn, heat stroke, heat rashes, and other flaws are becoming increasingly prevalent. Pests will proliferate swiftly in higher humidity and temperature environments, and malaria may spread like wildfire. According to the Nigerian government and WHO figures, the 2000 floods claimed the lives of almost 1,600 Nigerians during ten years.[31]

[25] Ibe, "A Study Of Petroleum Related Pollution In Nigeria,"

[26]Akpodiogaga P, Ovuyovwiroye O. "Quantifying the Cost of Climate Change Impact in Nigeria: Emphasis on Wind and Rainstorms," *J. Human Ecol*., 28(2) 2009: 93 –101.

[27] FGN (Federal Government of Nigeria). *Federal government labor and productivity figures* , 2010.

[28] "The Challenges of Sustainable Development in Nigeria. Land Tenure and Environmental Degradation, Ibadan."*Nigeria Environmental Study/Action Team* (NEST), 1992.

[29]Ibid.

[30] A.O. Amosu, O.O. Babalola, "Coastal Environment Management and Aquatic Resources" *Triad Association Lagos,* 2003: 138-143. .

[31]A.C. Ibe, "Nutrient Input into the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem.". *The Hague Netherlands,* 2005.

The Challenge to Agriculture and Forestry

Agricultural yields in the North-East have decreased by 23% due to rising temperatures and drought in Nigeria, where agriculture is 85% rain-fed, and many crops are sensitive to salinity changes and temperature. Widespread desertification is more likely to occur when there is more heat and less rain, especially in Northern Nigeria. According to the Federal Ministry of Environment (FME), in the twenty-first century, two-thirds of the states of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, and Kebbi may turn into desert or semi-desert. The Sahel is currently engulfing human settlements at a rate of around 1,400 square miles per year; evidence indicates a 400 percent increase in dunes in the previous 20 years. However, hydrological modeling indicates that more than 11,000 m^2 of coastal Land will be submerged by a 1.5-foot rise in sea level. The Delta region, which includes Lagos, stands particularly low on Nigeria's densely populated, rapidly urbanizing 500 m long Southern coast with its easily flooded network of estuaries, rivers, creeks, and streams.[32]

Akpan asserts that the characteristics of climate change include excessive heat, low relative humidity, high/mild wind velocity, insufficient precipitation, extremely dry plant growth, rising sea levels, and global warming. The primary productivity of fisheries may drop with every 1°C increase in sea temperature; in other words, the more abundant the resource, the warmer the water is.[33] Ajayi and Findlay assert that ecosystem characteristics may impact any temperature increase. For instance, increased temperatures have caused Lake Chad, which was once the sixth-largest lake in the world and a significant source of irrigation and water supplies for more than 10 million people in the riparian states, to shrink to a tenth of its previous size. Drought is already present in northern Nigeria due to rising temperatures and less rainfall.[34]

Some researchers think that one of the main factors contributing to environmental degradation in northern Nigeria is deforestation. Despite the lack of comprehensive statistics on deforestation in Nigeria, the existing material paints a rather dismal picture. The World Resources 1990-1991 Report estimates that in the 1980s, deforestation in Nigeria was expected to be 400,000 hectares per year, whereas replanting was only 32,000 hectares. This equates to an annual rate of forest loss of 2.7 percent. Nigeria's natural forests cover 10.9 million hectares, or about 12%, of its total land area as of 2010. Natural forests covering 97.8 square kilometers, or 59.5 million tonnes of CO2,

[32] "Figures cited in Federal Ministry of Environment, National Policy on Desertification and Drought." FME *Federal Ministry of Environment*, 2008.

[33]E.A. Akpan. "Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors in Environmental Health." *Nigeria Conservation Foundations* (Lagos: Macmillan (Nig) Publisher Ltd, 1995), 157-174.

[34]T.O. Ajayi, *et al*. "Aquatic Living Resources and Climate Change in the WACAF Region". *Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research,* Lagos, Nigeria. 1989.

will have been lost to the nation in 2020.[35] By the middle of the century, no remaining northern forests will exist if current trends continue. Only 30% of the nation's Land is thought to be covered in forests (about 277,132 sq. km). Because of this, the 60 million hectares of forest forests in 1897 had been reduced to about 9.6 million hectares by 1986. Between 1990 and 2000, Nigeria lost 409,700 hectares of forest annually. This is equivalent to a yearly deforestation rate of 2.38 percent. The annual rate of forest change increased by 1.2 percent to 3.12 percent between 2000 and 2005. Between 1990 and 2005, the nation lost over 6,145,000 hectares, or 35.7%, of its total forest area. The central portion of Nigeria's forest cover has shrunk by 1,230,000 hectares.[36] The more significant percentage of these activities and their effects are in the northern Nigeria territory.

World Resource Institute estimates that 25 out of 274 mammals and 2 out of 114 reptiles in Nigeria are endangered.[37] More alarming is the increasing disappearance of indigenous varieties of food plants which are being replaced by foreign varieties. Many farmers abandoned the traditional cultivars while favoring the new high-yielding and sometimes better-tasting varieties to increase crop yields. The result is the loss of indigenous species and uniformity replacing diversity. Previously plant diversity had helped protect the farmer's crops from loss or damage, especially when a disease or pest struck one variety of crops; there usually would be another variety immune or partially immune from this, thus limiting damage and preventing hunger or famine. When disease strikes the new varieties, it may destroy an entire crop. For instance, these local varieties, like Anpkak (Vigniasp) and Ambirigang (Mucuna Sp.) in the beans family, have disappeared where they are grown in the Zango-Kataf local government area of Kaduna State. In the yam family, the red yam (Anabvu) grown by the Kajje people of Kaduna State and Dioscoreadumetorum, an aerial yam, is no longer cultivated. The "Snake tomato" (Trichosanthis sp.), a close climbing relative to the pumpkin, in which its ripe fruit was used as tomato, has been replaced by the commercial tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum).[38] The "hungry" rice (Digitaria exiles), called Acha, which is a rice-like grain eaten in seasonal gaps between harvests in Pankshin and the Southern area of Kaduna state, is lost, while Takurigan (the round groundnut) is no longer found in Kaduna and Katsina states.

Šabbāth As a Response: An Analysis of Leviticus 25:2-5

Every issue has an answer. God knew from the beginning that mistreatment of the soil would cause environmental harm. He then dedicated a year after six years of labor and the fiftieth year after

[35] "Nigerian Deforestation, Rate & Statistic." https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/NGA/?category=summary&dashboardPrompts&showMap=true.

[36] "Nigerian Deforestation Rate and Related Forestry." https://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/forest-information-archive/Nigeria.htm#:~:text=12.2%25%20

[37] World Resources Institute, "Sustaining Forest for People and Planet." https://www.wri.org/forests. February 14th, 2022.

[38] Ibid.

that as a *šabbāth* for the Land. As a result, he instituted the "*šabbāth* day of rest" (Jubilee). Leviticus 25:2–5 reveals the principles that would remedy the issue of environmental degradation.

Exegesis and Exposition

Leviticus, the third book of the Hebrew Bible, receives its name from the first word וַיִּקְרָא which translates to "And He (the Lord) called" (1:1). A conjunction such as "and" or "then" denotes an uninterrupted continuation of the Exodus narrative in Leviticus.

Leviticus, which means "about the Levites," comes from the Latin *Liber* and the Greek *Levitikon* of the Septuagint. Even though the Levitical Covenant requirements are only explicitly addressed in two passages, this title is relevant because the book encompasses those requirements (25:32, 33). Characters that repeatedly recur in the book are the priests.

Author and Date

Nearly all the traditional Jewish and Christian scholars thought Moses wrote all five volumes of the Law until around 150 years ago. God revealed the information to Moses written in Leviticus when He reestablished the covenant with Israel (1:1; cf. Exod. 34:1-28). Twenty of the book's 27 chapters begin with the line "The LORD spoke to Moses," which makes Leviticus unique in that it essentially serves as a record of God giving Moses instructions. Although Leviticus says that it was all exposed at Sinai (Lev. 27:34) and before other portions of the Torah appear to assume that it arrived in Moab's steppes (Num. 1:1, NIV). According to the Exodus and Leviticus dates, the latter was composed in 1444 BC.[39]

At least two objectives were in mind when the book was written: (1) for the entire Israelite community to comprehend and value their rights and obligations before God; and (2) for priests to avoid gaining oppressive influence over the people by having a monopoly on knowledge regarding how to approach God.

Chapter 25 marks the conclusion of the laws that God gave the Israelites on Mount Sinai. It provides the only laws governing land ownership in the Pentateuch. Similar to Moses' earlier commandments for the Israelites, these regulations were for the Promised Land. God owned both the Israelites and the country. He showed them kindness. God explained to them that He controlled their lives, time, and space. They were intended to be on the ground that belonged to God, just like the Land itself.

They were to manage it as a result of following His instructions. The commandments in this chapter about the *šabbāthical* and Jubilee Years focus on bringing wealth back to the Land following seasons of use. They are, therefore, essential and created for the prosperity of the Israelites. All of God's laws are for the good of His people. Wiersbe continues, "As the ancient Jews, we are stewards of God's blessings, and we must be mindful of abusing or wasting them.

[39]5Eugene H. Merrill, "Leviticus," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 72.

God is worried about ecology and how we handle His creation."[40] Sailhamar continues, "The main subject of this last series of instructions is rehabilitation. Israel was governed by seven-year cycles, or "*šabbāth* years." God's people were restored entirely in the Year of Jubilee, which followed for seven years.[41]

The Text (Leviticus 25: 2-5).

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם--וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ, שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה.[2]
שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךָ, וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כַּרְמֶךָ; וְאָסַפְתָּ, אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ.[3]
וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת, שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ--שַׁבָּת, לַיהוָה: שָׂדְךָ לֹא תִזְרָע, וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמֹר.[4]
אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצוֹר, וְאֶת-עִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר: שְׁנַת שַׁבָּתוֹן, יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ[5]

[2] Speak to the Israelites and say to them when you come into the land which I give you then shall keep the land a *šabbāth* to YHWH..
[3] Six years you may sow your field, and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in its produce.
[4] But in the seventh year, there shall be a *šabbāth* of complete rest for the Land, a *šabbāth* to YHWH; you may neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.
[5] The aftergrowth of your harvest you shall not reap, nor the grapes of your untrimmed vines shall you pick; (for) it shall be (a year of) complete rest for the Land.

1. verse 2. וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם--וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ, שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה (*'when you come into the land which I give you then shall keep the land a šabbāth to YHWH*.). A significant connection with the origin of the שַׁבָּת (*šabbāth)* is the etymology of the word שַׁבָּת. Lexicographers group it with the verb שָׁבַת (to cease, stop; to stop working, celebrate; to rest).[42] God commanded the people to rest on the seventh day and to allow the Land to rest on the seventh year (cf. Exod. 23:11).
2.

It has been speculated that the *šabbāth* year began to be observed after the conquest of the Canaan land. Some say it was the eighth year since they arrived. Others, however, argue that the observance did not begin until the fourteenth year because the first six years were spent in the defeat and partition of the Land (Jos. 5:12). God's instruction for the Israelites is that the *šabbāthical* year was to be practiced after six years of agriculture.[43]All agricultural activities were to be suspended every seventh year, and cultivators were forbidden from entering the soil. It was utterly fallow, and the crops and plants it produced were the public property of the poor and strangers. The weekly *šabbāth* was a refreshment for men and animals; therefore, this year of rest was intended to restore the Land's productive powers. It began immediately following the

[40]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch* (Colorado Springs, Colo: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 296-97.
[41]John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 361.
[42] Harold H.P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament." *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation.* D.A. Carson edt. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipt and Stock Publishers, 1982), 23.
[43]*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*.https://biblehub.com/commentaries/leviticus/25-3.htm.

ingathering feast and was intended to teach the nation the surety of God's presence and providential might.

3. verse 4. וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת, שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ--שַׁבָּת, לַיהוָה: שָׂדְךָ לֹא תִזְרָע, וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא *But in the seventh year, there shall be a šabbāth of complete rest for the land, a šabbāth to YHWH.* Israel was to do this as a practical indication that the Land belonged to God, not to them, by planting grain crops and fruit-bearing plants on the Land. It sounded like fundamental ecology as well. Allowing the ground to rest for seven years would help replenish essential minerals that might otherwise be depleted.
4.

3. verse 5. אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תְקַצֹּר, וְאֶת-עִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר: שְׁנַת שַׁבָּתוֹן, יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ There must be no orderly picking of self-seeding harvests or fruits like figs and grapes throughout the *šabbāthical* year. People are to acquire food wherever they can, much as the Israelites did in their wilderness wanderings, from whatever the soil yields without human assistance. It was also a significant statement of faith in God, as Israel declared that God would provide for their necessities. The length of the nation's slavery was decided by their failure to uphold this command; Leviticus 26:34 states that if Israel does not obey, God will ensure that the Land receives its *šabbāthsby* exiling the people to an enemy territory; this was fulfilled during Israel's Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

Application of שַׁבָּת **(*šabbāth*)**

1. Application of Principle of Land Rest. By inference, one of the definitions of *šabbāth* preferred in this article is "rest." Resting in God's service allows the nation to regain its strength and production. Resting also restores the strength of the Land, improving efficiency. Modern agronomists have kept the tradition of allowing Land to lie fallow regularly. The Israelites were not required to till the land "to death" by God (to rape their setting). It is God's property. Environmentalists have claimed that the Israelites sanctified their control of the Land by using it correctly, just as God expected of His offspring.

Similarly, in Northern Nigeria today, if land rest can be implemented for at least some time, environmental deterioration will be significantly reduced. The principle is still utilized in the South-East and South-South, where Land is used for many years and then abandoned for a set duration after harvesting the crop. This principle has contributed to the South-East and South-South remaining green.

Application of the Principle of Land Stewardship. The crops that grew throughout the *šabbāthical* year were considered a sacrifice to Yahweh by the people. God forbade them from harvesting them. He gave the enslaved, employed, foreign inhabitants, aliens, cattle, and animals (Vv. 6-7) unrestricted access to what He owned.

Israel was to learn that the earth was created for man as God's people, but not solely for him to draw from its energies. Instead, to be holy to the Lord and enjoy in His glorious rest, and that the

noble cause for which the Lord's flock came into being did not include the continuous tilling of the ground, associated with disagreeable labor in the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3: 17, 19). Also, in the tranquil enjoyment of the earth's fruits, which the Lord their God provided them and would continue to give them without their labor if they sought to maintain His covenant and satisfy themselves with His grace. Northerners frequently use "this is my land" without expressing remorse. This knowledge aids in the transformation of particular residents' attitudes about land stewardship, allowing them to stop abusing the resources. When one realizes that what one thinks is theirs belongs to God, one's perspective on how to use it shifts.

3. Application of the Principle of Devotion. The full *šabbāth* year reflected the resources God provided for humanity in the Garden of Eden. When God created people and placed them in the Garden, they were not to work for a living but to worship. Similar to this, everyone was expected to equally share in all the benefits that God had bestowed throughout the preceding year (Lev 25:6). In the Garden, God gave humanity eternal rest (Gen 2:9, the Tree of Life; 3:22b), as well as a time for devotion (the *šabbāth*) (Gen 2:3). The *šabbāth* year represented a time of worship and repose. As he has on numerous other occasions, the author intended Israel's ownership of the "fair land" promised to them as a return to the Garden of Eden. If northerners accepted this God-centered culture, it would promote recognizing God as the landowner and discourage the wasteful exploitation of resources meant for human and non-human use.[44]

CONCLUSION

There is no apparent separation between the environment and humanity because they are both parts of God's creation. On one of the days of creation, just like the rest of the animal and plant species, humans were also created. The human being is significantly more intimately related to all other created beings than to the God who created them, despite having origins that may be traced back to one of the days of creation. All creatures should live harmoniously because they are all somehow connected to humans. Their close relationship to the enduring creation has a profound effect when taken seriously. The word "ecology" is derived from the Greek word *oikos*, which means "house," suggesting the existence of a single extended family. What humans do to one part of it impacts other sections; it is now a fact that pollution induced by environmental degradation harms human life, and the extinction of certain natural predators has left pests with a relatively free hand. This means that anything they do to the other members of creation affects them.

The reality of global warming is that their contempt for other creations for self-aggrandizement is beginning to have negative environmental consequences. Much of the increased concern about global warming stems from enlightened self-interest rather than self-sacrifice. On the other hand, Northerners must be conscious of the creation because their activities impact it and because it belongs to God, is valuable to him, and should be to them. Humans may consume other living

[44]John O. Enyinnaya, "The Theological Perspective on Responsible Citizenship," *The Bible & Responsible Citizenship* Series 3, 2010: 104.

species as food. However, they are not to be repressed or destroyed for fun or straightforward enjoyment. God created the other animals, so they are distant relatives. God values the welfare of those other creatures, and they should also value it (Leviticus 25:6-7). Therefore, humans should treat the rest of creation with respect.

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