

A proper creation care theology will evince a thorough read of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (OT/HB). Reason being that the OT/HB is arguably the principal factor that unites all Christians (and Jews) in terms of a shared source of imagination and a common “language” with which to understand the world—that is, of course, Christ and the New Testament notwithstanding. Without the OT/HB, we would know nothing about God, ourselves, or God’s creation which we inhabit. Indeed, the NT remains relevant. Yet for now, suffice to say that the OT/HB deserves first treatment because it is the first testament, and because it surpasses the NT in sheer word count as well as words speaking directly about creation care. Hence, I commend the following summary of the OT/HB, which highlights some of its key themes regarding creation care. This summary is based on the Jewish canon of the OT/HB, which comprises three major sections: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketuvim*).

The first five books of the OT/HB—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—form what is called (among many names) the *Torah*, meaning “law/teaching.” Narratively, it is vast in scope, running from creation to Canaan-land. Distilling such a thick and broad-sweeping collection is difficult to say the least. Nonetheless, for teaching purposes, I suggest that the *Torah* has at least two key themes: divine creation(s) and divine command(s). Divine creation(s) refers to how that the *Torah* deals directly with the character of God, the nature of the world, and the being of its inhabitants. From Genesis, we learn that God is both at once creator of the cosmos and garden-in-chief over all creation(s)—human and otherwise (Gen 1–3). Likewise, divine command(s), refers to the *Torah*’s chief concern about the purpose of God’s creation(s) and especially that of human creatures. Namely, God created human creatures to announce God’s reign throughout creation by imaging God, and to tend and keep creation—cultivating from/within it, life, health, and well-being unto perpetuity (1:26–28; 2:15).

The middle section of the OT/HB is called the *Nevi'im* (or “the Prophets”) and is delineated into the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets). Whilst the *Torah* takes us from creation to Canaan-land, the Former Prophets detail the taking of the land (think Joshua) to the losing of the land (think Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Likewise, the Latter Prophets explain the losing of the land, giving reasons as to why the Israelites lost it. Land is important to creation care theology be-

cause, in the biblical imagination, it is—quite literally[!]¹—the very grounds through which all God’s creations (human and non-human) are to experience God’s blessing(s), concretely in the form of food, water, and habitation. In other words, blessing is not just some abstract spiritual concept or well-wish. But rather, blessing has taste and savor.

Thus, part of our calling as God’s people is to attend to the land

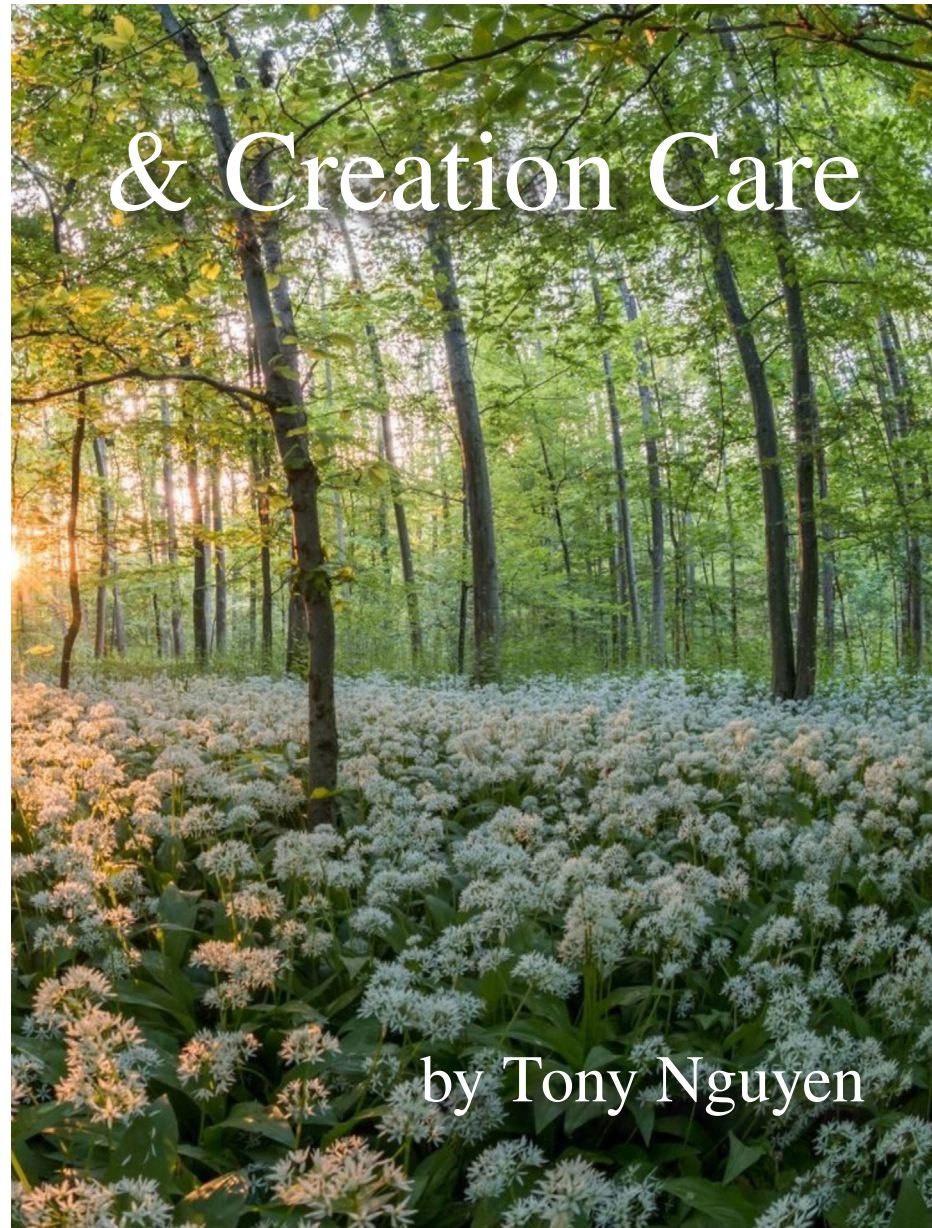


the Old Testament

in order to preserve it, thereby ensuring that all God’s creation(s) may enjoy God’s blessing(s) unto perpetuity. And yet, this is exactly where God’s people have failed. Hence, one of the key themes of the *Nevi'im* is the proclamation of God’s judgment, justice, and righteousness. In the biblical story, rather than attending to the land and being a blessing to its neighbors, the Israelites eventually gave into worshiping all sorts of idols and foreign gods. Interestingly, what some of us might not know is that in the ancient world, accepting the patronage of foreign gods was often part-and-parcel with negotiating socio-politico-economic agreements.

For example, during the time of the prophet Amos (around the 8th century), the Israelite kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been striking massive trade deals with its neighboring nations on exports of grain, olive oil, and wine. The results of which were newfound heights of wealth and affluence yet to be experienced by the Israelites up until this point. While wealth and affluence may sound good on the surface, the reality of the matter was that not all Israelites felt the effects of their kingdoms' success. Indeed, many if not most Israelites actually became impoverish, often

other gods who were not the LORD God of Israel. Of course, upon reading the rest of the book of Amos, the writer makes clear that the result of the Israelites' dealings was their destruction at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. In sum, the book of Amos (along with all the Latter Prophets) makes clear that God is in the business of doing justice, and doing justice means exacting due judgment upon all who do and do not uphold righteousness upon the land.



& Creation Care

by Tony Nguyen

going into debt slavery due to their rulers' foreign trade policies which led to many Israelite families getting kicked off their own ancestral lands and even at times coming back onto those lands not as owners but as slaves to those lands which, at one time, used to grow all sorts of produce and foodstuffs for their own kitchen tables, then became massive estates dedicated to producing commoditized exports which only foreign nations and affluent Israelites had the luxury of reaping the benefits from. And again, all of this was laden with the reception and acknowledgment of

The third section of the OT/HB is the *Ketuvim* (or "the Writings") which begins with the Wisdom books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job) and ends with Chronicles. In between are the Five Megillot (or "Scrolls"), which include Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, then followed by Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. This last section is perhaps the hardest on which to pinpoint one coherent theme throughout each book, as each is vastly different from the other regarding genre, style, literary form, etc. Even so, one could say at least that the *Ketuvim* is interested in life and life with God. As to creation care, I add that it is interested in life with God on the land, in and with creation. Of course, each book brings its own unique concerns vis-à-vis creation care. For example, Proverbs suggests that wise living directly translates into creation's life, health, and wellbeing (ex. 3:5–11; 12:11). Yet contrarily, Ecclesiastes suggests that this is not always the case; rather concluding that life, health, and well-being finally depend on God's grace (ex. Eccl. 2). Even so, because the *Ketuvim* is multivalent, any theological points about creation care will require a robust interpretation of all its books—as it should be with the entire OT/HB!

Lastly, note that I have all but nearly avoided using individual bible verses in constructing this theology of creation care, instead opting for whole books—and as many as possible! This was intentional. I believe that if we were meant to draw a theology of creation care—or of anything—from just a few verses, then perhaps we would have only received those few verses. However, that is not what we were gifted. Instead, we were gifted the whole OT/HB canon consisting of whole books which (evidenced by how we have received them) we are meant to read in conversation, each book alongside the other. Therefore, this creation care theology is by no means exhaustive but merely a foretaste into the wide world that is the OT/HB.

