Tainted Pet Foods: and the Lost Dominion

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."
—Proverbs 12:10

FROM THIS SCRIPTURE WE learn that the tender mercies of an upright man are marked by the degree of compassionate care that he extends toward the animal creation, as well as to those of the human family. The mark of the unrighteous, in contrast, is manifest by cruelty.

The collection of wise sayings from which this text has been selected were written many centuries ago by Solomon, who was renowned for his great wisdom and understanding. "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give

subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."—Prov. 1:1-4

Wisdom and understanding are valuable traits that should be sought by the consecrated child of God. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings." (vss. 5,6) Heeding these instructions and admonitions are true features of a mature Christian. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."—vs. 7

LAWS PERTAINING TO ANIMALS

God's righteous laws were extended to man's care as a shepherd over the lower creation. When domestic animals were found straying they were to be returned safely to their rightful owner. (Exod. 23:4) If they were laden too heavily they were to be relieved. (vs. 5) They were not to be overworked, but to be treated humanely (Deut. 22:10; 25:4), and were also provided under the Sabbath laws with a time for rest.—Exod. 23:12

MAN'S DOMINION

When the earth was being prepared for man's habitation, the animal kingdom was completed first, and Adam was given the privilege of naming them all (Gen. 2:19,20); and God proclaimed that it was good. (chap. 1:25) Then, when the creation of man had been finished, God said, "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." (vs. 26) The subject of man's dominion over the lower creation and his responsibility as a God-given shepherd was clearly shown.

Later, when speaking of God's human creation and its relationship to the lower animal creation the Psalmist David said, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. 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. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth."—Ps. 8:5-9

THE TREE OF LIFE

This beautiful and harmonious scene was soon marred when Adam disobeyed God's righteous laws, thereby plunging himself and the future human family into sin and its penalty death. The animal kingdom began to fear man and to dread his superiority. (Gen. 9:2) As an illustration of the destruction of man's dominion over the animal creation, the Prophet Daniel records a remarkable dream in which King Nebuchadnezzar recalled the tree which he saw. "Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great."—Dan. 4:10

Nebuchadnezzar then proceeded to describe the tree in more detail. "The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much,

and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it." (vss. 11,12) The king saw in symbolic vision God's wonderful gift of life to his human family, and man's position in relation to the animal creation.

The king was unable, however, to understand what he saw next. "I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches." (vss. 13,14) Thus is described in the king's own words the destruction of the tree of life and its effects upon the whole earthly creation that had been put in place by the Heavenly Father and his beloved Son.

MAN A POOR SHEPHERD

Man continues until now to be alienated from his Creator and the animal creation. This condition will not be rectified until Christ's future kingdom of truth and righteousness will be ushered in, and bring an end to all injustice and unrighteousness in our evil and sin-sick world. At that time, the human family will come to know and love their loving Heavenly Father, and they will also come to love and appreciate his wonderful and diverse animal creation.

In recent years, attempts have been made through certain 'animal rights' groups to help alleviate some of the suffering that man as a poor shepherd has heaped upon the lower creation which can

neither defend nor speak for themselves. Injustice has come about through exploitation in many forms, as animals are brutally victimized through inhumane treatment, cruelty, and neglect. Others have suffered barbarous treatment as beasts of burden or engines of war. Innocent animals have given their lives through lab testing, ongoing medical research projects, and testing for cosmetic and other industries.

There is also the cruel aspect of 'sport hunting,' especially in wilderness areas of the world. In some cases, this has led to the near extinction of certain species, such as the American bison which was slaughtered indiscriminately in great numbers for sport.

ANIMAL RIGHTS GROUPS

A slogan that is used among some enlightened groups is to 'shoot with a camera instead of a gun.' One of the animal rights groups in the United States conducted an interesting National Pet Owners Survey during the years 2005-2006. This was done under the direction of the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association (APPMA). The report, which includes important statistics, indicates the huge numbers of American households that have a dog or cat in their home, and in many cases several pets. The survey shows that at the present time there are approximately 73 million dogs owned by American families. This represents 39% of all homes in the United States that have at least one dog. Owners spend in excess of $200 annually for veterinary care, and 70% of the animals have been either spayed or neutered.

The APPMA survey also showed that there are about 90 million pet cats in American households, representing 34% of all homes in the United States. Cat owners spend $180 for veterinary care every year, and 84% have been spayed or neutered. These figures do not take into account the many stray animals that are forced to look after themselves.

This study shows that dogs and cats are truly an extension of a large proportion of American households. It also indicates the level of professional care that pet owners are willing to provide for their animals. It is evident that a large percentage of Americans include domesticated pets such as dogs and cats as an extended part of their family environment. Many other types of animals are also kept as pets including rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, goldfish, and many others, but this report focuses on domesticated dogs and cats as the most popular of all animal species.

PET INTERACTION

The Delta Society, which is an organization devoted to the study of pets, and their various contributions to mankind, has done research relative to the importance of animals in the lives and well-being of the human family. The report references a recent study conducted by New York State University at Buffalo, NY that has come to the conclusion that senior citizens who own pets do not need to see their family doctor as often as those who do not. The study showed that even among the most highly stressed dog owners, a very large percentage of them required fewer physician visits than did those who did not own dogs. Researchers also studied the

medical records for both male and female employees who worked in very highly stressed positions. They found that those who were pet owners experienced a greatly reduced increase in blood pressure than those who did not own a pet. The leading doctor who was conducting the study announced that the results were "dramatic and significant." It was acknowledged that while medication can lower blood pressure, it cannot relieve stress which may force blood pressure back up. The research team chose either a dog or a cat for each participant in their study and at the conclusion of the program nearly all said that they had become very attached to their pets and intended to obtain one for themselves.

Among the many other factors studied, the report determined that the companionship of a pet, especially a dog, helps children in families adjust better to a serious illness or the death of a parent. Pet owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog, or sharing a residence with someone who owns one. Having a pet develops nurturing behavior in children who tend to be more nurturing as adults. Positive self-esteem of children is enhanced by owning a pet. As well, the study showed that pets decrease the feeling of loneliness and isolation. Nearly three quarters of those families who were surveyed reported an increase in their overall happiness and general well-being after acquiring a pet.

PET THERAPY

Using pets for therapeutic purposes has gained increasing attention in recent years for a wide variety of situations. As companions, they are often a comfort to people suffering from AIDS, cancer, or other

serious illnesses. Pets have been found to boost the morale of the elderly living in nursing homes or with mentally ill patients. They also are a benefit to inmates in prisons that have pet therapy programs.

Unlike people who often speak or act unpredictably, animals usually provide a constant and stable source of comfort. Animals tend to bring out the nurturing habits in people, and make them feel unconditionally accepted. They can simply be themselves around their pets.

TAINTED FOOD SCANDAL

It is against this profound sense of compassion amongst American families who have pets that the widespread 'tainted pet food' scandal was recently announced. It has aroused indignation from pet owners across the United States and Canada. A deadly form of contamination was discovered, and businesses that sold pet foods were informed to remove certain brands of food from their shelves until government officials could declare that the situation had returned to normal.

At first, no one seemed able to determine exactly how wheat gluten, which is used to thicken pet food gravy, had become contaminated. Many people were surprised when they learned that the source of the problem was traced to China. As a result, the food trade industry with China has been brought under closer scrutiny and with increasing fears that tainted products could also find their way into the human food chain.

Although there has been no official announcement from the United States Food and Drug Administration, it was thought initially that the

contamination was caused by melamine, which is a plastic derivative used for fertilizer. This was somehow mixed in with the wheat gluten that was imported from China. The FDA only inspects a very small amount of the food that is imported from China, but shipments have recently been rejected.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, pet owners have been advised to feed their animals either dry food, or natural brands that do not contain gluten. Petco, which is a natural brands outlet has about 850 stores nationwide, and had no problems due to contamination of their products. The online Natural Pet Store was also not subject to the recall of around 100 varieties of pet foods. Both of these suppliers realized a huge increase in sales as a result of the tainted pet food scandal. There has also been a rush on the sale of all kinds of cookbooks for pets in an effort to avoid poisoning the family pet.

DETERMINING THE FACTS

Efforts are being made to learn the approximate number of deaths that have actually occurred due to pet food poisoning. The FDA has been slow in keeping up with the situation, but has continued to proclaim a very low and unrealistic number. Meanwhile the American Veterinary Medical Association is in the process of surveying its 30,000 members to help determine how many animals have become sick, and how many of them have died.

One veterinarian said that the crises in the pet food industry was not just an unfortunate accident, but part of a mounting evidence of a systemic breakdown. Menu Foods, which is based in Ontario, Canada, is the company which is at the center of the

scandal, and has expanded their recall of tainted products several times. Their reasons were that they had discovered that the suspected wheat gluten had been shipped to many other plants. Menu Foods' announcement has led American FDA officials to doubt whether or not there could still be contaminated products on store shelves.

THE SOURCE

In the light of the growing problem, the American FDA has recently issued a "detention without examination" order concerning wheat gluten. The order focuses on products derived from a Chinese company—Xuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Co. Ltd.—which is based in Peixian, China. The company's spokesman Mao Liju has denied any involvement in the scandal but says that they will investigate the possibility of their wheat gluten containing melamine. An American FDA official has stated that all samples of the company's products have tested positive for melamine.

THE HUMAN FOOD CHAIN

The question has now been raised as to whether or not the human food supply is safe. Because of the increasing likelihood of such a catastrophe, the Del Monte Company has voluntarily withdrawn some of its products that could possibly be suspect. The company's spokesperson has said that wheat gluten has been supplied as a 'food grade' additive, which is a grade considered safe for human consumption. However, the company has issued a voluntary recall for several products under the Gravy Train, Jerky Treats, Pounce, Ol' Roy, Dollar General and Happy Trails brands.

Wheat gluten is sold in both 'food grade' and 'feed grade' varieties. Either may be used in pet foods, but only food grade gluten may be used in the manufacture of products meant for human consumption. The scandal is focused on poisoned pet food, but there is the question concerning the human food supply through its many processors and distributors. The director of the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine said the FDA is not aware of any contamination of human food products, but that it cannot be definitively ruled out.

The problem remains that wheat gluten is a common food additive that is used as a thickener, dough conditioner, and meat substitute. It is widely used as an additive in commercial bakery products and for special purpose flours. The FDA has traced the problem to the processor in China but has not released the name of the distributor in the United States who supplied the product to Del Monte, Nestle, Purina, Hills Nutritional, and Menu Foods. At the time of this writing, there have been more than 70 brands and over 60 million cans and pouches of dog and cat food that are part of the massive recall. It is not yet known whether Xuzhou Anying sells direct to manufacturers in the United States or in other countries. FDA testing is being extended to also include corn gluten, cornmeal, rice bran, and rice protein in both feed grade and food grade products.

A SIGN OF SELFISHNESS

Selfishness, greed, and the desire to make larger profits is responsible in great measure for the unfortunate plight of the family pet and all affected animals. We appreciate the concern and compassionate

efforts of the animal rights groups. They promote awareness relating to action and controls toward the treatment of animals, but it will not be possible to bring about humane treatment for all animals that have been left in the care of man during this present reign of sin and death. Since sin was introduced to the world, animals have been exploited and pets have often been abandoned, neglected, abused, and left to fend for themselves.

GOD'S PROMISES COME TRUE

We know that the answer to all of the world's problems will be rectified during the administration of Christ's future kingdom. At that time, the fair and equitable laws of God concerning mankind and the lower creation will once again bring blessings for all. This wonderful hope is revealed in the marvelous promises of God.

The Prophet Isaiah describes the harmonious scene in the animal creation in the future perfected earth. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. . . . and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' [adder's, *Marginal Translation*] den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:6-9

Further to Isaiah's wonderful prophecy, we recall the previous scripture text in which King

Nebuchadnezzar saw a vision of the tree that provided fruit and meat for all of God's earthly creation and that was subsequently hewn down. (Dan. 4:10-14) By God's powerful and overruling hand, Daniel was able to interpret the true meaning of the king's dream. The tree had been cut down, but God had revealed his ultimate purpose for restoring it.

THE TREE RESTORED

Daniel thus wrote, "Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven." (Dan. 4:15) The roots of the symbolic tree that had been hewn down were to be preserved for a future time in fulfillment of the promises of God. The prophet looked forward in time to the day when God's plan of reconciliation, and his promises to restore his earthly creation to life, would become a reality.

In relation to this promise spoken by the Prophet Daniel, we note the writings of Job, who was another of God's servants of old. He also wrote concerning the tree that had been destroyed. It would be restored at a future time to bring life and blessings for all the earthly creation. "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant."—Job 14:7-9

THE WATERS OF LIFE

Water is a powerful symbol that is used in the Word of God to portray the restoration process that

will give life in fulfillment of God's long-standing promises. The waters of life and blessing will be offered to all of the obedient of mankind by the faithful members of the church who will have been called, tested, and elevated for that purpose.

The Psalmist wrote, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." (Ps. 1:3) Again he said, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."—Ps. 72:6-8

HEALING OF THE NATIONS

The Revelator described the encompassing scene when all will be restored to beauty and harmony. "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."—Rev. 22:1,2

We look forward to the kingdom of righteousness when the whole earthly creation will be blessed in God's wonderful world of tomorrow. At that time, the words of the Psalmist will become a reality, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD."—Ps. 150:6 ■